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NATURE AND SPORT IN BRITAIN

From a photograph by J. Coster.

A HAUNT OF OTTERS: MICHELHAM PRIORY.

PLATE I.

NATURE AND SPORT IN BRITAIN

BY

H. A. BRYDEN

AUTHOR OF "HARE-HUNTING AND HARRIERS,"
"GUN AND CAMERA IN SOUTHERN AFRICA,"
"KLOOF AND KARROO,"
"NATURE AND SPORT IN SOUTH AFRICA,"
ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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1904

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DEDICATED

TO MY BROTHER

WILLIAM RADFORD BRYDEN

A GOOD SPORTSMAN

AND A TRUE LOVER

OF NATURE

M304039

AUTHOR'S NOTE

SOME portions of this book have appeared in *The Fortnightly Review*, *Longman's Magazine*, *Chambers's Journal*, *The Saturday Review*, *The Field*, *Country Life*, *The Sporting and Dramatic News*, *The Standard*, and *The Pall Mall Gazette*. I am indebted to the courtesy of the Editors of these publications for their permission to republish here.

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NATURE AND SPORT IN BRITAIN

CHAPTER I

A SUSSEX MARSH

Pevensey Level—Its attractions—The eel-fisher—Sussex dialect—Sheep-washing—A legend of William Rufus—Pevensey and Herstmonceux Castles—A herony—The rare spoonbill—The "Crumbles"—Shore flowers—Wildfowl—Grey phalarope—Hooded crows—Black scoters—Marsh hare hunting—Sussex smugglers—The "lookers"—Floods—Marsh islets—A reposeful scene.

THE wide stretch of marshland known as Pevensey Level, or, more familiarly, Pevensey Marshes, lies to-day very much as it has lain these two hundred years past. It has seen but little change since Charles II.'s time. There are, perhaps, more dykes, the system of water drainage is more perfect, and the winter floods are of less volume. But in other respects the aspect of the country has seen few changes in two centuries. It is one of the quietest parts of Sussex, and until the era of the safety cycle few people other than sportsmen, cattle dealers, and the Marsh graziers set eyes upon it. Within the last half-dozen years cyclists from Eastbourne, Bexhill, and Hastings have begun to know something of the Marsh and its aspect; but as a rule these are folk not greatly interested in the country and its wild life. Some few may discover the

home of the handsome yellow iris, flaunting its yellow banners by the dykeside towards early June, or pluck the water-lilies here and there ; a bird-lover or two may note the herons fishing pensively amid the wide green plain, or winging their majestic flight towards Herstmonceux and Windmill Hill. But the majority of wheeling folk pass over the Marsh unheedingly, knowing nothing of its history, still less of the quiet pleasures that may be gathered within its borders. To them the chief matter is whether the wind is for or against them ; if with them, they whisk across the few miles of level road happily enough ; if against them, the buffeting breeze entails a sore struggle and earns many an objurgation.

Yet to those who cultivate its friendship and seek its pleasures, Pevensey Marsh has a wonderful charm of its own. Its wide skies, its spacious sunrises and sunsets, its rolling autumn mists, the pleasant hills that enlap it, the lonely line of Martello towers along its seaward aspect, the magnificent contours of Beachy Head and the rampart of South Downs that rise westward, the fat green pastures, the well-to-do cattle—all these things carry with them much contentment to the wandering and observant eye. Thoroughly to appreciate the sport and the wild life of the Marsh and its shore-line, one must, of course, serve a somewhat close apprenticeship. Nature requires wooing, and it takes time and patience to induce her to yield up her secrets. It takes time, too, to become familiar with the country people, their sports, ways, legends, and the curious knowledge that has descended to them from remote times. It was two or three years, for instance, before I became acquainted with a Marsh eel-fisher and his methods. Seeing an old, rugged-looking fellow one day tramping along the road with a great canvas bag,

and a long pole having at its extremity a singular, flat-pronged fork, I fell into conversation with him and learnt his trade. He was an eel-fisher, and made some part of his living by spearing eels in certain parts of the Marsh dykes. It is a hard and not a particularly paying business, yet this man seemed singularly attached to it. He had known the likely spots and the deepest holes all his life, and the flavour of sport imparted, I suppose, much of the pleasure which undoubtedly he obtained from his arduous following. He feels deftly for his prey, and, having located an eel, jabs into it with his flat, slightly barbed prong, and hoists out his catch. Sixpence a pound is the price he gets for his booty, which, considering the long walk to and fro, the toil of wielding his long and heavy pole, and the uncertainty of his catch, is by no means an extravagant remuneration. In this part of Sussex the peasants speak in a way that recalls very clearly their Saxon origin. *Th* is invariably pronounced by them *d*. Thus, when one hears the familiar *the* uttered as *de*, one might almost fancy oneself listening to a Boer or a German, both of them, after all, not so very remotely connected with the South Sussex hind.

One of the prettiest summer scenes of the Marsh is at a certain sheep-washing, which takes place in the stream near Sewers Bridge, on the far side of the Level as you ride to Ninfield from Eastbourne. This has been a sheep-washing place for centuries, and the method of procedure is without doubt identically the same as that practised in the time of Elizabeth—ay, even of the Plantagenets. A narrow part of the stream is hurdled off, and the sheep are passed from the green meadow through the watery alley-way, emerging clean, if somewhat breathless, at the farther end. An old-fashioned inn, an orchard, gay with blossom, and the

hill rising gently from this eastern end of the Marsh, add a sufficiently pleasing background to a unique Marsh picture. It must have been while hunting in the ancient forest beyond this spot, remains of which still linger between Sewers Bridge and Bexhill, that Earl Moreton, near kinsman of the Conqueror, to whom was granted the Rape of Pevensey, saw on the day and hour of the death of Rufus that dreadful vision of which he has left record. Straying from his followers during the chase, he beheld a great and terrible black goat, carrying upon its back the naked body of the slain Red King. The Earl solemnly charged this apparition by the Holy Trinity to tell him wherefore it bore such a burden. To which it answered, "I am carrying your King to judgment; yea, that tyrant William Rufus," and so passed on its way, to the exceeding disquietude of Robert, Earl Moreton.

Historically, the Marsh and its vicinity are full of memories. The noble ruin of Pevensey Castle, with its splendid remains of Roman and Norman times, lies well within the Level, and many a good hare is hunted each winter round the old grey walls. In the heart of the little rounded bay of Pevensey landed the great Conqueror himself, taking seisin as he fell, in either hand, of the soil of England. Across the Marsh, looking northward from where Duke William landed, stands the magnificent ruin of Herstmonceux Castle, a stately and unique pile built by Sir Roger de Fiennes, who fought with Henry V. at Agincourt. This noble castle was reared in the reign of Henry VI.; it is built of brick, and is undoubtedly one of the earliest forerunners of the Tudor brickwork manor houses. The bricks of which it is composed are small and thin, and as hard almost as pieces of flint or iron. Here at Herstmonceux formerly existed a fine herony.

The herons, however, have shifted their habitations, and now build their nests at Windmill Hill, half a mile away. One of the pleasantest of spring sights, to my mind, is to watch this fine herony during the nesting season. The great birds are constantly going and returning to and from the group of tall trees in which their habitations are placed, and one can observe and appreciate their grand flight to its greatest advantage. The neighbouring Marsh dykes and streams afford ample fishing-grounds, and one seldom crosses the Level without seeing these acute and patient fishers. Fish, frogs, eels, newts, and even water-voles, and the young of moorhens—for these birds are carnivorous as well as fish-eaters—form their staple diet. After watching the Windmill Hill heronry closely for several seasons, I come to the conclusion that about the same number of birds frequent it each year. What, then, becomes of the increase of population, added by the rearing of young each spring? It is hard to say. Our grey heron of Britain is found widely distributed over the world—in Europe, Asia, Africa, even in countries as far distant as Japan and Australia. It is not impossible that, like the wandering Briton himself, our English herons pass into far distant regions beyond the seas, and make there new homes and abiding-places. I have watched with interest the common heron in South Africa, and have wondered to myself whether he was "colonial-bred" or, like myself, "home-born." It is, I think, certain that few British heronies show any appreciable increase of population, except temporarily during the nesting season.

A fairly near connection of the heron, the now rare spoonbill, occasionally strays to Pevensey Marshes. Although never now nesting in England, as it used to do, the snowy spoonbill makes an occasional pilgrim-

age in May, June, or July. In East Anglia these birds have become familiar in recent years on Breydon Water, near Yarmouth, and, with the protection they are afforded, may possibly even attempt to nest again in Britain. In Sussex they are scarcer. Still, they occasionally pay our marshes a surprise visit. A specimen, shot, I regret to say, a few years since on the eastern part of Pevensey Level, is to be seen, stuffed, at the inn near the sluice.

Many interesting birds, some resident, some merely migratory visitors, are to be seen on the marshes and their shore-line.[1] Snipe and wild duck are fairly common, teal and widgeon occasionally met with. In hard winters many of the rarer wildfowl and sea-ducks become familiar. In the hard and prolonged frost of January and February, 1895, wild geese were to be found in many parts of the Marsh. So tamed were they by cold and starvation that they were actually seen resting in the garden of a Marsh farmer, and could have been shot from one of the homestead windows. Not many were killed; they were, as a farmer's son said to me, too poor to be worth eating. Many rare sea-ducks were about the coast at the same time. I remember that while skating near the sea, within a mile of Eastbourne, on some flooded hollows amid the wide expanse of shingle known locally as the "Crumbles," wildfowl flew over the heads of the crowd of skaters on several occasions; among these I noted that beautiful duck the Golden-Eye. This strange expanse of pebble beach, the Crumbles, runs from Pevensey to Eastbourne, and is about three miles in length by three-quarters of a mile at its widest part. It has many attractions for wild birds, and at one time

[1] During the winter of 1902 some Glossy Ibises—far wanderers indeed—were about the Marsh, and a few specimens were shot.

From a photograph by J. Coster.

PLATE II. PEVENSEY MARSHES.

I imagine the stone-curlew, or thick-knee, sometimes called Norfolk plover, found an excellent breeding-place here. Rabbits are abundant, and hares betake themselves hither when too hotly pursued on the scent-holding pastures of the adjacent Marsh. In summer the handsome sea-poppy, or horn-poppy, blooms here abundantly, and its delicate yellow flower and the fine blue of a wild borage show notably against the grey glare of the interminable shingle. The sea has much receded along this part of the coast, and whereas in in old times ships rode at anchor close to Pevensey Castle, it is now nearly a mile from the walls of that stronghold to the shore.

Along the coastline of the marsh many notable and some rare birds are to be seen at different seasons of the year. Flights of dunlin, wheeling in the winter sunlight like little clouds of drab and silver, or running briskly along the edge of the tide, are familiar objects. I have noted along the quiet shore-line between Pevensey and Little Common redshanks, sanderling, stints, knots, and grey phalaropes. These last are rare visitants, which occasionally rest here on their way south. The grey phalarope is one of the most interesting birds that visit our shores during autumn and winter. Breeding in Spitzbergen and other remote places within the Arctic Circle, it may be seen during summer swimming contentedly among the icebergs off the coast of Greenland and other frigid shores. It has been observed as far south as Chili and New Zealand. As with the divers, the legs are compressed; the toes are coot-like, with curious lobed webs. In size the bird is somewhat bigger than a dunlin. These birds are usually, on their first arrival, extraordinary tame, and, unfortunately for themselves, are easily shot. On shore and in flight they look

extremely like sandpipers, and are occasionally mistaken for them. They are most expert swimmers. The red-necked phalarope is a much rarer visitant. I shot one morning a black tern and that elegant little wader the pigmy curlew, or curlew sandpiper. Gulls and terns are, of course, constantly fishing along the coast. Two elegant plovers, the ring-plover and the grey plover, are to be noted. The ring-plover is to be constantly met with, running with twinkling feet along the wet sands; the grey plover is not a common visitant, but is occasionally to be seen. Oyster-catchers are not uncommon. On the Marsh itself, besides many small birds, snipe, wildfowl, herons, partridges, and the green plover, which nests here commonly, are familiar; the hen harrier is now and again to be noted. And at intervals peregrine falcons, which breed in the cliffs not a dozen miles away—I will not indicate precisely where, for obvious reasons—sweep over the wide Level. I am told that Montagu's harrier and the Marsh harrier have been seen on Pevensey Marshes. These rare wanderers I have myself never had the good fortune to set eyes on in this locality.

It is curious to note with what extraordinary regularity the hooded crows appear and disappear in this part of Sussex. These birds come to the marshes for the winter, arriving from the north about the middle of October, and leaving towards the end of March for their spring and summer quarters in Norway and elsewhere. In the mild winters experienced during the last few years the sea-going ducks have been less common than in harder seasons. Black scoters, often called "black duck," are exceptions, however; they are constantly to be seen in Pevensey Bay. In January of the year 1902 I watched some two hundred of them riding easily on the tide 200 yards from the shore.

These birds are, of course, wretched eating, and are not worth powder and shot. So fishy is their flesh that in Catholic countries it is permissible to eat them during Lent. But even a good Catholic, one would imagine, must be very hard up for food to dine off a scoter.

One of the features of Pevensey Marsh is an old-fashioned pack of foot harriers, which in winter rouses the blood of the inhabitants and enlivens the landscape. By reason of the innumerable dykes which bisect it the Level is practically inaccessible to foxhunters. Horses cannot compass these deep and trappy dykes, and broken backs would be too often the result if men attempted to ride the country. With foot harriers the Marsh is perfectly feasible, and many a stirring run is enjoyed by the hearty farmers and yeomen who principally support the pack. The younger sportsmen follow hounds pretty closely, and some first-rate long jumping is to be seen. Occasionally you may notice a thoroughbred Marsh lad negotiating the dykes with a leaping-pole, having at the end a flat button of wood. The elder sportsmen carry long five-foot staves, locally called "bats," by the aid of which they are able to cross the slippery and narrow pieces of wood which here and there are thrown across the ditches and act as bridges. The Marsh hares are extraordinarily stout, and stand before hounds, I am inclined to think, quite as well as their brethren of the downs. They are extremely plentiful — too plentiful, in fact, in some places—and sport is never lacking. The hounds employed are old-fashioned English harriers, standing about nineteen inches. They show a good deal of the ancient southern hound type, and have rich, deep voices, which may be heard far across the levels. A few ladies patronise the hunt, and, nathless the deep dykes and wet going, seem to enjoy the sport as keenly

as their fellow-hunters of the sterner sex. Here hare-hunting may truly be said to flourish in the old-fashioned manner. Hares are not coursed to death, as is too often the case with dwarf foxhounds—the quarry has a fair chance for her life—and runs of an hour and a half or two hours are not uncommon. I know of no part of England where hare-hunting may be more thoroughly enjoyed than with the Hailsham Harriers on Pevensey Marshes. Plenty of hares are killed; during the season of 1900–1 some thirty brace were accounted for by this pack. At the eastern end of the Marsh the Bexhill Harriers, a mounted pack, descend periodically from their higher country on to the Marsh pastures; but, as I have indicated, the Level is not by any means adapted for hunting on horseback —that is to say, when hounds run hard.

The Marsh graziers, besides being good sportsmen, are, like most of their fellows throughout England—one may say throughout Britain—among the most hospitable people in the world. It seems a real pleasure to these hearty, downright souls to welcome hunting folk and set before them every good thing in the way of eating and drinking that their homesteads can produce. They are few in number, grazing being an occupation in which small holdings can have little part or lot. Some of these families and their forbears have lived in the same homesteads for generations. They have strange tales, handed down from their fathers and grandfathers, of the old smuggling days. I gather from these narratives that there dwelt in the eighteenth century scarcely a single farmer in this locality who was not in some way or another mixed up in the free-trading business. Men between fifty and seventy have told me, with a keen twinkle in their eyes, how their grandfathers evaded the excisemen, and sank their

ankers of spirits in the Marsh dykes, or hid them in stacks or other convenient places. All this coastline seems to have been, like that of Romney Marsh, peculiarly adapted for running contraband cargoes. The Sussex smugglers were bold and desperate fellows, and were little inclined to stick at trifles. They were accustomed to oppose force by overwhelming force, and usually got the better of the preventive officers. So recently as the year 1822, on the 11th February, three hundred of them, says Mr. W. D. Cooper, in an interesting paper printed in the *Suss. Arch. Coll.*, "went to Crow Link, near East-Bourne, to land a cargo, but were stopped by a signal from the sentinel; four nights afterwards they landed at Cliff Point, Seaford, three hundred half-ankers, losing only sixty-three and a horse. On the 13th (two days later) they attacked the sentinel at Little Common (near Pevensey Marsh) with bats (thick ash poles about six feet long); he, however, shot a smuggler with his pistol. The boat made sail from the land, and a coach and six, which was waiting at the back of the beach, drove off empty to Pevensey." The last of these encounters seems to have occurred in this neighbourhood in 1833. "The smugglers, having killed the chief boatman of the local Blockade Service, formed two lines on each side till their cargo was run, and then left, not, however, without several of their party having received wounds. All escaped capture."

Sussex longshoremen seem to have shared with Cornishmen an evil reputation for wrecking as well as smuggling. Congreve says of them in some of his least elegant verse:—

> "Sussex men that dwell upon the shore
> Look out when storms arise and billows roar,
> Devoutly praying, with uplifted hands,
> That some well-laden ship may strike the sands,
> To whose rich cargo they may make pretence."

Besides the graziers about the Marsh, a number of men, known locally as "lookers," are employed by distant farmers who hire or possess grazing on the Level. One or two of these live on the Marsh itself; others dwell in the villages or hamlets near. The "lookers" are a kind of bailiff who keep an eye on the cattle put under their charge. They and the sturdy labourers who keep the dykes clean know more about the Marsh and its nature than any others. Where the wild duck lie, where the snipe are plentiful, the nests of partridge and green plover, the seats of hares—all these things are to them as an open book. It is natural enough that followers of the harriers should wish to be, as they usually are, on terms of friendship and amity with these people, important personalities as they are of the Marsh and its vicinity.

Marsh floods are not so frequent or so great as they used to be. The sluices at Pevensey and elsewhere were carefully improved and repaired in 1804, when troops were encamped all along this coast, and Napoleon's invasion was momentarily expected. These enable an excess of water to be passed away seaward. If the French had landed, the whole level would have been at once flooded, and the difficulties of the enemy would have been added to by water as well as fire. Yet occasionally an abnormal and sudden rainfall will still flood the Level, farms are cut off, and their inmates have to reach the mainland in boats. Three or four years ago such a thing happened, and Horse-eye, Chilley, and one or two other homesteads were isolated. It is not difficult to understand how places like Horse-eye and Chilley gained their titles. They are little eminences in the Marsh, which in the pre-Norman days, and probably long after, were more often than not mere eyots or islands in the waste of flooded

From a photograph by J. Coster.

PLATE III. THE END OF THE MARSH.

level. Eye—an islet—is, of course, much the same word as the Norwegian *ø*, pronounced *eu*. Horse-eye, being the most considerable elevation in the Marsh, was no doubt the islet where, in time of inundation, the horses, the most valuable and important of the country people's stock, found safety and grazing. Chilley, where another homestead stands, was, I imagine, in those far distant days often completely submerged, while the brow of Horse-eye stood bravely above water. Pevensey, Langney, Rickney, all marsh places, owe their terminations to the same fact, and were beyond doubt elevations or islets in the waste of fen.

The flat, verdant meadow of Pevensey Marsh is typically English, one might almost say typically South Saxon. It lacks the width and space and foreign aspect of the Norfolk Broad country, or the spreading marsh lands of Holland. The friendly pleasant hills encircling it smile always a kindly welcome to the occupant, and break the feeling of utter loneliness. The seascape gleams familiar beyond the low line of shingle. Here one can be completely alone with nature in her calmest and most attractive mood, without the sensation of being banished from mankind. In certain parts of the South African interior, notably amid the endless plains of Ngamiland, the enormous void of sky, the never-ending flats, sun-scorched and burning, seem at times almost terrible in their monotony. Here upon this green English marsh there is no feeling of that sort. Nature is friendly, confiding. You may seek her secrets, spend hours and days in her company; her face is nearly always placid, soft, reposeful. The breeze blows pleasantly from the sea; the plovers flap overhead, calling at you or upon one another with high voices; the heron fishes undisturbed yonder as you

pass along; even the reed bunting and his wife, just now busy with their nesting arrangements, seem to know that the Marsh spells peace and restfulness. A summer day spent amid these quiet Sussex pastures, with their pure air, their homely beauty, and their complete repose, is no bad thing for any man. A day here in winter, with the deep, mellow cry of harriers sounding over the leas, is in its way as fine a tonic as any healthy-minded person shall desire. If, like the writer, you can still run and leap a dyke, you may enjoy to the full as merry a hare hunt as any part of England can still offer you.

CHAPTER II

THE OLD DECOY

The heart of the woodland—A neglected covert—Where the pool once stood—A mighty reed-bed—The decoy ditches—A forgotten quince tree—How the decoy was worked—The decoy ducks—The dog and its business—The capture—Some great takes of wildfowl—Ancient duck-driving—4,000 fowl bagged—A Mexican method—Value of decoys—Fritton and its income—Present British decoys—Former plenty—A vanishing system.

IT lies—neglected, unknown, forgotten—in the heart of a patch of woodland, no great way from the sea, what was once a good and profitable decoy—the pride of the squire on whose estate it existed, and the joy of the decoy-man's heart. Its glories are gone with the legions of wildfowl which once made this countryside their home, flighting over the flat marshes to and fro between the shore-line and the decoy pool. The neighbouring villagers still call the place the "'Coy," but even the oldest of them can now scarce recall the time when the decoy was in use and working order. Where once was heard the clangour of hundreds of waterfowl, silence now reigns. For some reason the covert is neglected. Once or twice during the winter a few beaters force their way through with infinite difficulty —for the place is sadly overgrown—and drive out a score or so of wild pheasants to the guns; but for the rest, foxes, the few pheasants, a woodcock now and again, and in the spring and summer numbers of singing birds, have the undergrowth to themselves.

Occasionally the foxhounds draw the little piece of woodland and rout out a fox; this and the rare pheasant-shooting episodes are the only events that ever disturb the wonderful quiet of the Old Decoy. It must, of course, always have been a solitary place. Wildfowlers and decoy-men must have quiet and peace—it was as necessary to them as din and uproar are to urban civilisation.

Wandering quietly about the heart of this abode of solitude, it is not difficult to make out the plan of the decoy as it formerly existed. The pool wherein the wildfowl once swam hither and thither has long since been drained, and upon its soft, alluvial bed now flourishes a vast crop of reeds and fen growth, five or six feet high. From the corners of this pool you may note easily where the ditches or pipes ran, up which the wildfowl were decoyed. These ditches were always curved, so that the fowl should not be able to pry too closely into the mysteries of what lay beyond, otherwise they might have been too scared to follow the decoy dog in that absorbing passage up the ditches which was to prove so fatal to them. Anyone who understands the working of this almost lost art can here still trace the whole scheme of affairs in which the wildfowler and his master took so keen an interest.

Buried in the very heart of the dense thickets which have grown up in this now neglected piece of woodland, stands a mute memorial of the old-time decoy-man himself. It is a curious and to me a very interesting relic, still flourishing there on the bank of where the pool once existed—a fine quince tree, which in its neglected old age still thrives bravely, putting forth each autumn a lusty crop of magnificent fruit. It is significant of the utter oblivion that has fallen upon the place, that even in late September or early October, when the tree

is laden with ripe, pale golden fruits, they are allowed to fall and rot, unnoticed and unknown. Not a soul, it would seem, knows of the existence even of the old decoy-man's quince tree, upon which, a hundred years ago and more, he set, I will wager, so great a store. The quince, as some people are aware, loved a moist situation—old-fashioned folk used to plant their trees in a deep ditch—and the decoy-man, who no doubt had some reed-hut or other shelter hard by, hit upon a perfect site for the fruit he loved when he planted his young sapling here. I can imagine the tough old fellow—for the wildfowler had to be a man of iron constitution to stand the life he led—regarding the tree with a look of pride now and again as he passed to and fro upon his business.

Even now, much more than a century since its planter was laid in his grave, the good tree thrives in this wilderness, putting forth its fair pale blossom each spring, bearing its crop of golden fruit each autumn, and giving promise, in spite of its neglect, of continuing to do so for generations yet to come. It is a pity, indeed, that its delicious fruit, the improver even of the goodly apple, when they are partners together in a pie, should thus fall and decay, forgotten and unmarked, each glorious autumn. Quince jelly, by the way, made when the fruit is ripe, not before, is one of the most delicious of all conserves, as our great-grandmothers and their forbears well knew.

Let us look back a hundred years or so, and see how the decoy-man went about his business. This is one of the most ancient of our English sporting methods; it is one which, decade by decade, falls more and more into desuetude, and it may be not uninteresting to see how it was managed. Imagine, then, the great reed-bed in front of us a broad and deep pool, as it was

in the eighteenth century. Over each of the gently curving ditches, or pipes, leading from its four corners, were set arched hoops of wood, which supported strong netting, wide and pretty high at the pool entrance, and tapering away by degrees until it ended in the purse-like funnel-net, completely hooped, in which the wildfowl finally found themselves. Hither our friend the decoy-man came at the finish of his capture to find his victims and put them out of their misery. His first plan of operation was, briefly, something like the following :—From behind his elaborate system of screens of reed-fencing, down towards the place where the "pipe" opened on to the pool, he watched with lynx eyes the mallard, widgeon, teal, and other fowl gathered upon the water. Between them and himself were some of his own tame decoy ducks, which understood him and his little ways—or at all events a part of them—perfectly well. Noting that a sufficient number of wildfowl were now gathered, he gave a peculiar quiet whistle, known to his own ducks, and cast some grains of hemp into the mouth of the drain. Forthwith, attracted by the whistle and the sight of the grain floating towards them, the decoys quietly paddled up and began feeding. At that, every head of the wild duck out yonder upon the pool went up. They knew the signs, saw and heard the greedy "scuttering" of their fellows, and they, too, came sailing up to see what good fare might be offering. Just at the entrance to the pipe they suddenly set eyes on an apparition which riveted their attention yet more. This was no less than the decoy-man's dog, carefully trained for the part he had now to play. Sometimes a tame fox was used. One was employed at the Berkeley Castle decoy some five-and-twenty years ago. And it is a fact that decoy-men preferably use for this purpose a dog of a reddish or fox colour.

From a photograph by J. Coster.

AN OLD DECOY.

PLATE IV.

The dog or the fox, if a fox was used, moved quietly to and fro for a minute or two, as the wild duck came nearer—the Berkeley fox used to wave his tail in a manner peculiarly and fatally fascinating to the birds—and then turned, made up the drain, and after seeing that the fowl were following him, and were well within the netting, disappeared. He had played his part and joined his master. It is a strange thing that the wild-fowl, although in reality inwardly alarmed at the dog in front of them, or that yet more dreaded foe the fox, almost invariably followed in pursuit of the vanished animal, and were presently so far involved that their fate was certain. On a sudden the decoy-man stepped from behind one of his reed-screens and showed himself. He was between the wild duck and the open water, and they no more dared to try for safety that way than they could burrow into the earth. Suddenly, too, they discovered, as they rose, that between them and the free sky was some terrible-looking stuff—the netting—which might wreak them harm. There was nothing for it—they must go straight on. They hurried on and on, fear lending them swiftness; the pipe and its covering grew ever smaller; until at length, frantic and blind with terror, the unfortunate fowl were safely snared in the pocket or funnel-net at the far end, where the decoy-man presently found them, wrung their necks, extricated them, and departed to make preparations for another campaign against their fellows.

Sometimes the fowl were decoyed by the tame ducks alone; sometimes, as I have shown, by a dog or a fox in conjunction with decoy ducks. Sometimes the dog was trained to appear at the mouth of the decoy, after the wild duck had sailed up, and so frighten them into the funnel-net at the far end. The result was usually the same—a bag, sometimes small, sometimes good,

sometimes a very large one, of fine and marketable wildfowl. At Ashby, a famous Lincolnshire decoy, for example, 113 wild duck have been netted in a single operation, while 248 have been taken in a day. The profits from the great decoys in the fen country, when wildfowl were numerous, must have been very great. Pennant, writing in the eighteenth century, instances a single season in which 31,000 wild duck, widgeon, and teal, the produce of ten decoys near Wainfleet, in Lincolnshire, were sold in London alone.

In the old days the fen wildfowlers had another system of taking duck in large numbers. Their methods are described by Willughby, a writer of the seventeenth century. The ducks, while in moult, and therefore unable to fly, were driven towards a certain point by men in boats armed with long poles, with which they splashed the water vigorously. The affrighted fowl were thus forced into a system of netting, and thereafter captured at leisure. This took place during what we call now the "flapper" season, when the young fowl are unable to fly and the old birds are disabled by the moult. It was a deadly practice, and one is not surprised to learn that in a single great drive as many as 4,000 fowl were thus ensnared at Deeping Fen. On another occasion 2,646 duck were taken in two days near Spalding. The system was, however, as wasteful as it was unfair, and it was put an end to by an Act of Parliament in the time of Henry VIII. It seems to have been a very old custom, and was in existence certainly as far back as the reign of King John.

This method recalls a murderous duck-destroying system formerly practised in Mexico, where vast quantities of wild duck were gently manœuvred by Indians towards a battery of seventy or eighty musket-barrels,

concealed behind rushes and so arranged that one tier of guns swept the water, while the other tier, raised a little higher, took the fowl as they rose. These musket-barrels were connected with one another and fired by a train. As many as 1,200 ducks were often slain by one of these discharges, and it is not astonishing to learn that during the fowling season these birds were cheap and plentiful in the city of Mexico. This battue was known to the Mexicans as the *Tiro-de-Patos* (duck-shooting).

In the good days, before the fens were drained, a well-managed decoy brought in several hundred pounds a year. So lately as 1898, in an action for compensation in connection with Fritton Decoy, near Lowestoft, the owner, Sir Savile Crossley, stated that the annual value of the take was then about £70. It is certain that some English decoys, more remote and better placed for the capture of fowl, must still be worth considerably more than that sum per annum. There are at the present time somewhere about seven-and-thirty decoys still used in England, while in Ireland three more exist. Of these five are in Norfolk, four in Suffolk, three each in Nottinghamshire and Somerset. Yorkshire, Shropshire, Essex, and Northamptonshire maintain two apiece. A single decoy is to be found in each of the following counties, viz. Bucks, Derby, Dorset, Glamorgan, Gloucester, Hertford, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Montgomery, Pembroke, Surrey, Sussex, Warwick, and Wilts. The three Irish decoys are found in Cork, Kilkenny, and Queen's County.

When one recalls the number of decoys formerly existing in this country, it is manifest that the glory of English wildfowling has, indeed, long since departed from us. In the old days, when the great fens were undrained, and the country swarmed with myriads

of fowl, when the bittern boomed from every marsh, and ruffs and reeves bred plentifully amid the wastes of Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Somerset, Lincolnshire alone could count no fewer than thirty-nine decoys. Essex possessed twenty-nine and Norfolk twenty-six. But as England has become drained and populated, wildfowl are no longer to be numbered by the scores of thousand as they used to be before the fens and marshes were reclaimed. Decoy after decoy has vanished from the scene, or lies dismantled and forlorn, shorn of its former interest and its former prosperity. The hardy fen-man has been driven to other and more prosaic occupations than that of wildfowling. Some few decoys will continue to remain to us for a generation or two longer; but they are doomed to vanish, and the end of the present century will probably have seen the last of them. To me, as to every other lover of nature, an old decoy, such as I have attempted to describe, must always possess a melancholy, yet an abiding, interest.

CHAPTER III

SOME FORGOTTEN EDIBLE BIRDS

Scarcity of ruffs and reeves—Wheatears—Now unknown as table birds—How ruffs were fattened—Bartailed godwit—"A bird of peculiar delicacy"—The knot and its value—A mighty shot—Redshanks and greenshanks—Dunlin—Curlew—Poor eating—Stints—The stone-curlew—A South African relative—Golden plover—How identified at table—The dotterel—Cranes and bitterns—Great bustard—a notable bag—Fieldfares and their excellence—The water-rail, moor-hen, and coot—Small birds patronised by our ancestors—Larks and sentimentalists—How to cook larks.

THE list of British birds which were formerly esteemed as delicacies by our forefathers is, when one begins to look into the matter, by no means an inconsiderable one. Some of these birds, such as ruffs and reeves, have fallen out of fashion owing to the melancholy fact that they are nowadays no longer attainable. The drainage of the fens and the advances of cultivation have practically banished them from these islands. In other cases the disappearance of certain birds from modern cookery books and the tables of gourmets and the well-to-do is not so easily explainable. Wheatears, for example, had somehow lost their high place in the estimation of *bons vivants* for some time before the introduction of the Wild Birds Protection Acts of the last twenty-three years. Yet wheatears were, and still are, undoubtedly, a great delicacy, well comparable, as they used to be, with the ortolan of the Continent. Under their present blessed state of immunity from capture, very few, indeed, of

these birds are tasted in this country, and they are now never seen in poulterers' shops, as they used to be until a few years back in certain Sussex coast towns. The South Down shepherds have, perforce, given up snaring them, and, although here and there some epicure may procure on the quiet a dozen or two of these dainties for his own private consumption, they are now practically unknown on English tables. These birds are in their prime in September, just as they leave our shores, when, fattened and recruited by their summer sojourn in mellow England, they are—I suppose one must say "were"—undoubtedly, delicious eating. Still, tempting as they are, I prefer the sight of these cheerful migrants, with their handsome plumage, and quick, restless, flirting ways, their tolerance of mankind, and their pleasant little song, to the same creatures baked, like so many blackbirds, in a capacious pie.

Ruffs and reeves have, like the wheatear, vanished from the kitchens of British cooks and the tables of the rich. Unlike those birds, however, they are, at the present day, very seldom found in these islands, except occasionally as mere passing visitants on their spring and summer migrations. In the days when they were plentiful, they were netted by the aid of decoys, and thereafter fattened for about a fortnight, being fed on boiled wheat, and bread and milk, mixed with hemp seed, and occasionally sugar. Thus prepared, they were considered by our ancestors among the greatest delicacies that could be offered to a distinguished guest. In another chapter I have dealt fully with the habits and history of these birds.

The bar-tailed godwit, known locally as the yarwhelp, sea-woodcock, and half-curlew, is another of the great family of wading birds which was formerly in much

estimation as a table luxury. It was taken in nets by means of stuffed decoys, much as were ruffs and reeves, and commanded a high price. The *Field Book*, published in the early thirties of last century, describes it as "a bird of peculiar delicacy." Although fairly common during the spring and autumn migrations, this godwit is now but little known except to marsh and shore gunners, and its undoubted merits as a table bird seem to have passed into oblivion.

Yet another wader, the dainty knot, a much smaller bird than the godwit, which weighs as much as twelve ounces, has become as a table bird almost completely forgotten. Yet the knot was, until a century or so ago, captured in much the same manner in the fen country, fattened in the same way for sale, and as much esteemed by many as its bigger cousin, the ruff. Knots are still frequently seen round our coasts, in some seasons in large numbers. Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey, one of the greatest and keenest of modern wildfowlers, bagged, not many years since, as many as a hundred and sixty of these birds at a single discharge of his punt gun.

Among other waders which, apparently, were looked upon by our ancestors as good table birds, were the redshank, curlew, dunlin, and bittern. In the time of Henry VIII. the redshank was priced at the value of a penny, at which rate teal and widgeon were then sold. In 1833 the market value was from a shilling to fifteen pence, which seems to indicate that the redshank is a bird of considerably higher table value than many people suppose. The greenshank, a much rarer bird in England than its cousin the redshank, is also well flavoured as to its flesh, and used to be esteemed very good eating. Dunlin, or ox-birds, known to our predecessors of Henry VIII.'s time, and even now by the country-folk of various districts, as "sturts," or

"struts," and "purres," were in 1512 rated at the value of 6*d.* a dozen. In 1833 poulterers priced them at the rate of 3*d.* apiece. Dunlin, however, besides being excessively tiny morsels when stripped of their plumage, are not particularly good eating, and at the present time are seldom tasted except by the poorer class of shore shooters and fisher-folk. Curlew, valued at 12*d.* in 1512, and at 2*s.* in 1833, are but poor things as table birds; at their best, however, during summer time, when living inland and feeding on the moors, they are just passable; when their diet is a seashore one their flesh is rank and unpleasant. Stints were certainly eaten by our forefathers, and in a Yorkshire estate book of 1760 are priced at 1½*d.*, only a ½*d.* less than snipe, which are set down in the same book at 2*d.* apiece.

The stone-curlew, or Norfolk plover—otherwise known as the thick-knee plover—is a bird of remarkable excellence from the culinary point of view. It is, however, a scarce bird in this country, and is sheltered, very properly, by the Wild Birds Protection Acts during a great part of its sojourn with us. I have tasted many a time in South Africa the "dikkop" (literally thick-head, a Boer name), which is a very near relative of our British stone-curlew. In appearance there is, in fact, very little difference between these two plovers. Both have the curiously rounded heads, large, protruding eyes—in the one case yellow, in the other (the South African) yellowish green—pale tawny brown mottled plumage, light underneath, long legs, and curiously swollen knee-joints. Both have the same squatting, crouching habits, the bird preferring rather to lie flattened completely on the soil, with the object—which, by the way, it often achieves—of escaping the gunner's eye, rather than mount the

air and make use of its wings. So good was the flesh of the South African thick-knee that we preferred this bird to all the bustards, save only the great *paauw* and Stanley bustard, and to most of the francolins or African partridges. Seventy years ago the market price of the Norfolk plover was no more than three shillings, so that it must have been then fairly plentiful. These birds still visit us, chiefly preferring the heaths and warrens of Norfolk and Suffolk, where they occasionally breed.

Green plover or lapwing, of course, we still eat, as also the delicious golden plover. I am afraid those uninitiated in the characteristics of these birds have, pretty frequently, in London restaurants, the peewit palmed off upon them instead of that much rarer delicacy, the golden plover. There is one infallible test by which the diner-out may settle the question of species. The right golden plover (*pluvier doré*) of the bills of fare has no hind toe, while the common green plover possesses that appendage. A glance at the feet of the bird placed before the diner will at once inform him whether he is putting his fork into a choice tit-bit or a very ordinary table bird. The grey plover, a very beautiful British bird, is also extremely good eating; but is now so scarce as to be seldom secured even by discriminating shore shooters.

The dotterel, a now rare species of the plover kind, is yet another bird to be classed among our lost luxuries of the table. Formerly netted by our ancestors in large numbers, it is now one of our scarcest spring and summer migrants, and is seldom set eyes upon, except by those who are close observers and watch very carefully in May or early June for its rare appearances.

In 1512 cranes were valued at sixteen pence apiece,

a considerable sum in those days. It is difficult to understand how our forefathers could have extracted any kind of pleasure from the flesh of this bird—now seldom heard of in this country—or from that of the heron, which was at the same period priced at twelve pence. The bittern, valued at the same period at twelve pence, and in 1833 at from five shillings to seven shillings, would scarcely be regarded at the present time, even if it were common, as a bird likely to lend itself to good eating. It is now distinctly one of our rare visitants, having ceased, with perhaps one or two exceptions in the Norfolk Broad country, to breed in these islands for more than a generation past. In the winter of 1899 there was an unwontedly strong migration of these birds, which were shot in many English counties. I never heard of any person having the hardihood to have one cooked, or if he did so and partook of the long-forgotten dainty, he preferred to keep his impressions to himself. If the bittern had been worth eating, according to our modern ideas, I think we should have heard of the fact during that winter. I have always regretted that I never tasted a bittern in South Africa, where these birds are common enough.

Of the great bustard, that prince of edible sporting birds, I speak in another chapter. Once a much and deservedly esteemed dainty on English tables, it is now, perforce, from the very rarity of its occurrence, a quite forgotten bird. Of old the pride of the banquet of many a high, noble, and well-acred squire, its fame is now no other than a mere tradition among us. Yet, until the beginning of the last century, these birds were familiar to British sportsmen. So lately as the year 1808, near the estate of Mr. W. T. St. Quintin, on the Yorkshire wolds, by aid of a stalking-horse and

a big fowling-piece, a gamekeeper to that gentleman secured no less than eleven of these magnificent birds as the result of a single discharge. Seven fell dead at once, while four others were gathered afterwards—a truly wonderful bag![1] I have twice heard of a successful right and left with *paauw,* the great bustard of South Africa, but a bag of eleven of these gigantic gamebirds is something to ponder over. In those days (1808) the equipment of a keeper on the wild Yorkshire wolds consisted, *inter alia,* of a trained stalking-horse, a coat made from the skin of a dead horse, with the hair outside, and a mighty gun—no doubt a 4-bore. Number 3 shot were used, and the stalker often got within thirty yards of his game. With this outfit the bustards, which in those days bred in this locality, were successfully circumvented.

Fieldfares, except among country people, are now well-nigh forgotten as table birds. Yet a cold fieldfare pie is, to my thinking, a most excellent dish, fit to set before any man. It is astonishing how these birds pile on fat on the breast and flanks, even in hard winter weather. I can remember as a youngster, during Christmas holidays in Warwickshire and Northamptonshire, making prodigious bags of these excellent birds —"felts" they are always called in the midlands— during snowy weather. And the great pies that ensued still linger in the memory with peculiar fragrance. Fieldfares can be either roasted like larks, cooked in a pie with bacon, or, as I think, preferably, made into a pie with the addition of thin slices of beef. Both the common fieldfare and the redwing were held in high estimation among the Romans, who kept them by

[1] A very interesting account of this and other remarkable shots at bustards was given by Mr. J. E. Harting in the *Field* of 6th March, 1897.

thousands in aviaries and fattened them with a paste composed of flour and bruised figs, as well, occasionally, as other food. They were kept in darkness, excepting at feeding times, exactly as quail are still fattened upon the Continent, and when properly "ripe" were sold to epicures at the rate of three denarii, or about two shillings of our money, apiece. The fieldfare is a common bird enough in our winter fields, and to those who still have the sense and knowledge to comprehend his worth is, even without fattening, a real delicacy.

The water-rail is by no means bad eating, and the moorhen, properly cooked, is well worth sending to table; the moorhen, in fact, is by no means a despisable quantity from the culinary point of view. I have heard of a certain yeoman, who understood good living as well as most people, who declared that he preferred one of these birds to a partridge any day.

The coot, so common a wildfowl in many inland waters, is not, nowadays, a bird often utilised for the food of English folk, except among poorer country people who have not the opportunity of attaining better fare. Yet at one time it was, beyond doubt, largely eaten even among the middle classes. Colonel Montagu, the ornithologist, who wrote at the beginning of the last century, says of this bird: "Vast flocks are seen in Southampton river, and other salt-water inlets, in winter. At this season of the year it is commonly sold in our markets, frequently ready picked. They look exceedingly white, but the flavour is rather fishy." I have tasted coot, and I can endorse this statement. Some of the fishy savour can be mitigated by skinning the bird and by long immersion in cold water, which should be repeatedly changed. It is also stated that to get the best results in the way of cooking the bird

should be shot early in the day. Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey, a great authority on wildfowl, says that when coots first appear on the coast in winter from their inland haunts they are "excellent eating." That seems to me somewhat high praise for this bird. To prepare coots for table they should be plucked, then well rubbed with rosin, after dipping in boiling water; by this means the troublesome black down is got rid of. Then comes the immersion in cold water, which should, according to Colonel Hawker, last for twenty-four hours, with frequent changes. Skinning is a troublesome process, and by some authorities is said to destroy the better flavour of the bird. "Moorhens," says Hawker, "may be cleaned in like manner (with rosin and steeping in cold water), and, if in good condition, they will then be equal to any waterfowl."

These notes will serve to indicate that we have among us a fair number of birds which are either absolutely forgotten as a food-supply, or are partaken of very sparingly even by country people. Looking at the miserable havoc wrought in Italy and other continental countries, and remembering the rare beauties of an English spring, rendered incomparably more fascinating by the sight and music of myriads of small birds, it is certainly as well that we have abandoned some of the propensities of our ancestors. In the seventeenth century, for instance, many kinds of small birds were eaten. Sparrows we still consider edible, and can well afford to put out of the world. A writer of 1677 says of this bird: "The sparrow is excellent food, and a great restorer of decayed nature." Alas! if this last statement were but true! We have enough sparrows in this country to give health to the whole population of these islands. Among other small birds recommended by the same author as a food-supply were the

"blackbird, throstle, nightingale, linnet, lark, and bullfinch." Of the chaffinch it is observed: "There is no scarcity of this bird, and, in my minde, fitter for the spit than a cage, having but one short plain song." Larks we still eat, as also, among village folk, blackbirds and thrushes. Happily we spare the magnificent little bullfinch, one of the finest notes of colour among English rural scenery. We spare also, happily enough, the cheerful chaffinch, which (I speak of the male) is, in his spring courting plumage, little less handsome than the splendid bullfinch.

As for the eating of larks, about which birds sentimental folk waste a great deal of unnecessary fervour, it is well to remind the admirers of this sweet songster —among whom I distinctly range myself—of a few concrete facts. In spite of the numbers of these birds displayed in poulterers' shops and eaten, there is, in rural districts, no perceptible diminution whatever in their legions, and their migrations from the Continent are still almost overpoweringly abundant. The lark's song is as widespread and as often heard throughout the length and breadth of the country as ever it was.

It should be remembered by those humanitarians who cry out against the destruction of larks that these birds, where they are numerous—and they are far too numerous for the farmer in many places—do an infinity of mischief to young crops, especially by biting off autumn-sown wheat, just as it is coming up. Larks are, most assuredly, not unmercifully destroyed: if they were not occasionally netted, their increase would be inordinate, and the land would most certainly suffer. Let the sentimentalist take a walk upon the Sussex downs, or any other open piece of countryside on a fine day of spring, and he or she will beyond any possibility of doubt be convinced that there are still

plenty of larks in England. They are to be heard, in fact, carolling their glorious song by thousands. I love the lark and its song as much as any man, but I am well aware that this bird is in some districts far too numerous for the farmer's well-being.

As for their excellence and utility at table there can be no possible question. They shine in various culinary ways, but in none better, I think, than when introduced into a pudding in the pleasing company of steak, kidneys, and oysters. The steak, kidney, lark, and oyster puddings served at the "Old Cheshire Cheese" in Fleet Street are still among the chief joys of the London diner who may happen to find his way so far eastward. This is, in truth, a real dainty dish, fit to set before any king. Larks are also, as has been said by a well-known authority, "pretty accompaniments to claret, when dressed *à la broche,* and certainly consolatory when served *à la minute* or *en caisse.*" For eating, larks, it should be noted, are in full season in November.

CHAPTER IV

A TENANT FARMER

A good type—Hope for the tenant farmer—A race of yeomen—An ancient home—The farmer's sire—Old hunting days—Sir Thomas Mostyn—Griff Lloyd, a hunting parson—Some famous masters of hounds—A farming start—Capital put into the land—Hereford cattle—Holding wool—'34 port—Walnuts and cowslip wine—Home-brewed ale—The wallet and bottles—Recreations—The market ordinary—Hard times—Racing and coursing—Idiosyncrasies—A well-spent life.

HE died in the year 1897, at the age of seventy-eight, a type of those substantial tenant farmers of the shires who, about the middle of the last century, may be said to have reached the height of their prosperity. For full five-and-twenty years bad times, changed conditions of agriculture, and foreign competition have dealt heavily with the once prosperous tenant farmers; and yet I think there are signs that they have seen the worst of the bad times, and are slowly turning the corner. Rents have been greatly reduced; corn has shown brief signs of better prices; expenses have been everywhere cut down; and now vacant farms are more in demand than they have been for years past. I believe there is yet hope for the tenant farmers, who, with the faults and failings of poor humanity, have yet so many good points. Take them all round, there is not in Britain a cleaner-bred, cleaner-living, more honest, manly, and straightforward class of men than this. Certain types of civilisation we can well afford to spare; it is needless to name them, they are numerous enough. But we can ill spare the tenant farmer.

A TENANT FARMER

The subject of this sketch, whom I will call John Weston, was born in the year 1819 in a midland shire —that of Northampton. In that shire his ancestors had been since Henry VII.'s time mainly yeomen farmers, occupying their own land. But, as Macaulay pointed out long ago, the yeoman has, since Charles II.'s reign, been a steadily vanishing race. John Weston's father was the last of a family of these sturdy yeomen. He lived in his own house, and farmed two hundred acres of his own land. In that ancient sandstone house, with its mullioned windows, low yet spacious rooms, and the date 1651 carved above its front doorway, was born John Weston, one of a numerous family of children. The old gentleman, his father, lived plainly yet comfortably. He was one of the old port-wine school, and when, at rare intervals, he entertained some of his neighbours after a coursing meeting or the like, his excellent cellar must, by his son's account, have suffered heavily from the assaults of the two and three bottle men of that period. The old gentleman was a famous shot, and with a neighbour commanded most of the partridge-shooting for miles around. His long-barrelled duck gun hung for many a long year in the kitchen of John Weston.

Hunting was always a passion with John Weston, and one of the earliest of his recollections was the meet of foxhounds in front of his father's house. The hounds were then hunted by Sir Thomas Mostyn, a Welsh baronet, and Sir Thomas and his long-skirted huntsman, Tom Wingfield, never faded out of his recollection. Nor did old Griff Lloyd, a stout, ruddy-faced Welsh clergyman, cousin to Sir Thomas, a survival of the port-wine-drinking, hunting parsons of the eighteenth century, who loved the chase better than he loved anything else in the world, and, despite

his immense weight, was usually to be seen at all meets of Sir Thomas's hounds. Griff Lloyd had a wonderful appetite of his own, and John Weston could well remember how the old parson used to relish the pork-pies, home-brewed ale, sherry, and other good things set forth at his father's table when hounds met near.

Although, in the fashion of those days, his father ruled his family somewhat despotically, John Weston was allowed a good deal of liberty in the way of sport. The gun, so much loved by his father, he never much took to, but of hunting and hunting-lore he never tired to the day of his death. One of the first glimpses I remember of him—a good many years ago now—was as he crashed through a tall fence on a well-bred chestnut, and presently rushed in close pursuit of the flying pack. Hunting, indeed, he loved above all other pastimes; he had followed hounds since 1830, and had memories of many celebrated masters: Sir Thomas Mostyn, Sir Charles Knightley, Old Squire Drake, his son, the well-known "Tom" Drake, George Payne, Squire Osbaldeston, Anstruther Thomson, and many others, who flourished long years before agricultural depression and wire fencing were dreamed of. He had a first-rate seat on a horse, and excellent hands, and his thin, upright figure, handsome fresh-coloured face, and snow-white hair and beard were familiar in the hunting-field until but a year or two before he died.

When his own father died, towards 1845—his mother had died many years before—the patrimony was sold and the proceeds divided among the five or six surviving children. I suppose John Weston's share amounted to something between £3,000 and £4,000—a very sufficient sum of money on which to start and stock a farm.

John Weston thenceforth became a tenant farmer on his own account. In the first instance he rented some four hundred acres, afterwards increased to rather more than five hundred. Not quitting his old village, he married and settled down — after a few years in a smaller dwelling—in a large, comfortable house of the country sandstone, built for him by the great landowner from whom he rented most of his holding. In that house he brought up his family, lived the remainder of his days, and was succeeded by his own son. He had had an excellent training from his father, and was a sound and careful farmer and a good judge of stock of all kinds. He had a great fancy for Hereford cattle, and the fine white-faced, deep-red bullocks were always a sight worth seeing in his pastures. Perhaps, if he had a failing, it was that he disliked hurry in business, was a little hesitating in his judgment, and in the old and good days, like many others of his fellows, kept his wool too long. Now and again he may have scored by thus holding back his fleeces from the wool-buyer, but in the long run I am convinced he was a loser rather than a gainer by the practice.

Like his father before him, he loved a good glass of port, and in his earlier days had laid down an excellent cellar. His '34—that wonderful vintage—lasted, if I am not mistaken, until a little past the eighties, by which time it was beginning to show undoubted signs of age. Yet was John Weston usually an abstemious man, well contented with his glass of home-brewed ale, except upon Sunday afternoons or when he had company. His cellar always held, too, good store of home-made wine. In autumn, when walnuts were ripe, the old gentleman loved no fruit so well, and a bottle of cowslip wine and a dish

of walnuts were among the chiefest of his simple pleasures.

Until past the year 1880 he brewed always his own ale and beer, and, as was then the custom, supplied his farm labourers with their liquor. Thus for the greater part of his lifetime he had, like his father, been accustomed to carry the small beer to his men in the old-fashioned wooden bottles, disposed in a strong wallet slung across his saddle. In harvest and hay-time the demands upon his ale cellar were heavy, and the replenishing of those wooden bottles a serious task. I see his erect, white-headed figure still hooking out each bottle deftly from his wallet with the end of his long-lashed whip and depositing it by its iron handle under the shade of the tall hedge.

He was extremely fond of blood stock, and for years kept a brood mare or two, from which he bred hunters and steeplechasers. He dearly loved the sight of a race, and occasionally indulged himself in that exquisite pleasure. He seldom travelled far from his land, however, and, although he read much for a farmer, his personal contact with the great outer world beyond his shire was small indeed. He had seen Cossack's Derby, and had been in London perhaps half a score of times. Once or twice in his younger days he had ventured to the Isle of Wight or to Wales; but in truth his place was at home, and he was seldom happy if long away. The business visit to the market town was always a quiet pleasure; but of late years the glories of the old-fashioned market "ordinary" have been reluctantly relinquished by most farmers who mean to survive the bad times. The bottle of port went first; then the "ordinary" itself was given up, and in place of a half-crown dinner and a bottle of wine a sandwich and a glass of ale sufficed to men

of John Weston's type—men with families, who meant to worry somehow through the lean and hard years of agriculture. Yet at home the hospitality seemed but little relaxed. In summer the house was seldom without friends and relatives enjoying the delights of the country; and when the foxhounds met, as they had done for five-and-thirty years, in the home-field, close adjoining the house, there was still the ever-hospitable table, the same kindly welcome for all-comers.

Few men ever spent less upon themselves. Dearly though he loved racing, he ventured upon but one bet throughout his married life. That was five shillings on Lilian, when she beat Lemnos in the Queen's Plate at Warwick in the early seventies. "A strange, good mare, Lilian," as the old gentleman used to say. Coursing—the old-fashioned style of coursing—was a pastime that had descended to him from his father. He usually kept a greyhound, and with a neighbour and his dog would sally forth into the fields to pick up a hare. The chase that ordinarily ensued was a brisk one, and, as the pair of greyhounds fiercely ran their quarry, the two mounted men would follow with the keenest alacrity. More often the field-gates sufficed them, but, in moments of excitement, John Weston would put his nag at a fence with as much ardour as if following the fox itself. His knowlege of the country-side was perfect. Every field, every gate and bridle-path for many a mile round was well known to him. The fox coverts of four shires were mapped out in his brain with wonderful clearness. He had seen many changes in his early days: waste land and heaths enclosed, new coverts planted; and he remembered most of the country byroads when travelling was made infinitely tedious by unending lines of gates. He had failings, of course. He was desperately tenacious

about rights connected with his land, and for years never spoke to a near neighbour with whom he was at feud concerning the cleaning of a boundary ditch. He was a trifle hot of temper until past middle life; stern with wrongdoers, and much in awe with delinquent crow-boys. In later life this severity of temperament became greatly relaxed. But, take him for all in all, few kindlier or better-hearted men ever breathed. He had to the end of life a perhaps exaggerated respect —a relic of the previous century—for his landlord and other titled magnates of the shire. I believe he never could quite bring himself to realise the absolute secrecy of the ballot. Whether for that reason, or from a quaint sense of loyalty to his landlord, a nobleman of strong Liberal tendencies, John Weston, although himself a Tory and Protectionist, never until the last few years of his life recorded his vote at the poll. He enjoyed the cheery sound of the horn, the stirring sight of hounds in full cry, until his seventy-seventh year. He had never failed in the most crushing of hard times to pay his heavy rent at the half-yearly audit dinner, and in his long life of solid, steady endeavour I do not think John Weston had ever done a mean or dishonest action. His good white head and bright, cheerful countenance will long be remembered by his fellow-sportsmen. And in the village, where a strange blank remains since the disappearance of his well-known figure, the shining example of that good and clean and well-spent life will not, you may be sure, for many a year be forgotten.

CHAPTER V

AN OLD RETAINER

A relic of the past—"Master" Jessey—A desultory character—An unpaid retainer—His self-imposed duties—Bees, ratting, rabbiting, fishing—Other cares—Master Jessey's costume—His homely vernacular—A "mollyern"—Honey wine—Mead and "metheglum"—Pike-fishing and its delights—Netting the Feeder—Great days—The end of a placid life.

EIGHTY or a hundred years ago the type of which "Master" Jessey was one of the last relics was, I suppose, common enough. But by the late sixties and early seventies, when I remember the old man, the privileged unpaid retainer of the old English country-house had become practically extinct. Master Jessey was, in fact, a belated survivor of a system which railways, machinery, and the stress and hurry of modern life have driven from their ancient abiding-places.

He was never called anything else than "Master" Jessey in the village in which he lived; that old-fashioned title signifying, I am inclined to think, in his case, a rank somewhat below the large farmers and graziers of the vicinity and yet a good deal above the poorer folk. The old man came of good Warwickshire yeoman stock. Latterly the family had declined a little from its former place, and Master Jessey's relations were now chiefly substantial tenant farmers under the great landlords of the county. Master Jessey himself had been bred up as a maltster, and, in the earlier half of the century, had, I have always

understood, pursued that business in a small, easy-going, desultory sort of way. But he had never much head or inclination for affairs of any kind. By degrees he let slip or abandoned what little business he had ever possessed, retired to a cottage, and devoted himself to the only life that matched with his ideas—the life of the open air. He must have possessed some small means of his own; his wants were few and his habits of the simplest kind. A mug of ale and a pipe of tobacco were among the few luxuries in which he indulged himself.

Released from the cares of the maltstering business, Master Jessey, in his own slow fashion, turned about him for an occupation. In due time he settled himself as unpaid retainer at a certain quiet country-house just upon the outskirts of the village. That must have been in the early forties. I first remember the old man in the middle sixties, when he had been long settled in his occupation. His plan of life was something of this kind. He usually appeared at the house soon after nine in the morning. If there were things to be done, he stayed about most of the day, receiving by way of fee a pint mug of good ale now and again, his midday meal, and, if he were late, his supper. The care of the bees; all matters pertaining to rabbiting; the capture of fish; the washing and cleaning of the muzzle-loading guns used in those days; the killing of pigeons, ducks, geese, and poultry—all these and many other minutiæ were looked upon as belonging to the department of Master Jessey. He was great at ratting, but with horses and gardening he meddled but little. In September he accompanied the partridge-shooters, helped to carry the bag, and looked after the dogs. He was never much of a man for the gun, although he loved sport of every kind in his own way. I fancy

his habit of body and brain was too slow and deliberate for the attainment of much success with the fowling-piece. I have seen him take a steady pot-shot from over a hedge at a rabbit feeding in the grass, and I believe he has been known to shoot rooks sitting; but beyond these attainments his ambitions seldom ranged. Fox-hunting he viewed only from the distance, but it is certain that the fox itself was as sacred an animal in his eyes as in those of the most staunch supporter of the county hounds.

I can always recall Master Jessey busying himself, in his deliberate way, in the stone-flagged courtyard of the old brown sandstone house to which he had attached himself. Sandy, the setter, lay outside his kennel in the sunshine, watching affectionately and with some interest the old man as he moved slowly from the brew-house to the pigeon-house, or from the walled garden, where the beehives stood, to and from the court. He never wore trousers to the end of his life. Drab small-clothes, with gaiters to match, clothed his nether limbs. His deep-skirted coat of the same material never altered, as long as I can remember him, in its old-fashioned cut. His grey head was invariably crowned by a tall grey chimney-pot hat. His neckerchief was folded twice round his neck and tied in a bow in front. He was a tall, heavy, big-framed old fellow, grey-eyed, somewhat fleshy of face, clean-shaved of course, with scraps of whisker high up on the cheeks, reminding one irresistibly of the period of Waterloo. The old man always spoke in the homely rural vernacular of Warwickshire and Northamptonshire, upon the borders of which he lived. He called, for instance, a gate a "geeat," a rabbit a "rawbut," an acorn an "akkern," a perch (fish) a "pearch." A heron he termed a "mollyern," the rightful derivation of which it is

rather difficult to satisfactorily explain.[1] And he used invariably the word "be" instead of our modern "are." "What booys you be!" for instance, he would remark to us after some youthful escapade. The old man, although a bachelor, liked nothing better than to have lads about with him, to whom he could impart some of his rabbiting and fishing lore. He loved above all things a day's ferreting, and would dig for hours with the utmost zest and patience sooner than a rabbit slain by the ferret should be left lying in its burrow.

Master Jessey was always a great hand with the bees. He had the entire management of the hives in his own hands, and would have deeply resented—so far as his slow, patient spirit would allow—any encroachment upon his rights and privileges. He understood nothing of the modern management of bees, and in those days his charges were always housed in the old-fashioned straw "skeps." Still, he managed very well, and was always pretty successful with his honey. When the making of the sweet, home-made honey-wine, known as mead, was about, the old man was naturally in great request. After the making of the mead, Master Jessey brewed from the lees and remnants an inferior and weaker liquor for his own consumption. This he called "metheglum," by which I suppose he meant "metheglin." The "metheglum," when bottled, went down to his own cottage.

I never saw the old man hurry himself except in two instances: When bees were swarming and had to be followed, or when a wounded rabbit seemed likely to

[1] "Mollyern," a term commonly used in Warwickshire, Northants, and Oxfordshire, is, I believe, nothing else than the rustic name for a female heron. It is now, however, and must have been for centuries, used to designate both sexes. Why, no man can say.

reach its hole and escape the gunner. Then the tall, heavy-framed old fellow would bestir himself a little.

A day's pike-fishing in a neighbouring lake or reservoir was always a red-letter day with Master Jessey. He knew nothing of modern angling; the gorge-hook and live-bait were his methods. And as we lads drew one of the gleaming, yellow-sided, white-bellied fish exhausted to the punt-side, and finally landed it safely at the bottom amongst our feet, there was always a peculiar twinkle of satisfaction in his grey eye as he took out his jack-knife, and, grasping the great fish by the eyes with thumb and finger, deftly ended its existence.

He was fond of the angle, and loved on a fine July or August day to lure lusty perch from deep, quiet waters with hook and worm. But of all forms of recreation that appealed to Master Jessey, one peculiar to his own district had, I think, for him the greatest of joys. Between a certain old reservoir and a canal some miles distant there ran through the rich pastures of that quiet corner of Warwickshire a stream locally known as the "Feeder." This stream used in those days to swarm with fish—perch, roach, gudgeon, and dace—and it was the custom to net it at the bridges, and so capture a great store of spoil. The big, sweet-fleshed perch, scores of them over a pound weight, and the silvery, delicious gudgeon, were in particular always welcome at the house to which Master Jessey had attached himself. Armed with the net, two plunging poles, a bucket or two, and the paraphernalia of lunch, we were accustomed to accompany the old man once or twice in a summer to the Feeder. Master Jessey disdained to carry his luncheon ale in glass bottles; he preferred instead to fill up one of the old-fashioned wooden bottles —then used for the field-labourers—with right home-

brewed ale from the cool cellar and carry it with him on these excursions. That wooden bottle held a gallon of ale, all of which on a summer's day Master Jessey could comfortably dispose of.

Arrived at the Feeder, the net was set at one of the small field-bridges, and the plunging began some hundred and fifty yards away—one plunger on either side the stream. The frightened fish were gradually driven into the net until the crucial moment came; then the leads were sharply picked up, the net hoisted over to the bridge, and thence to the meadow, and its gleaming contents picked out. Those were great days for Master Jessey, and he was particular in seeing that the performance was carried out with due ceremony and detail, exactly as had been done by his father before him. He looked always to fill at least two large buckets with fish—mainly perch and gudgeon—from such a morning's work, and he was seldom disappointed.

With these and other ancient and innocent forms of recreation Master Jessey filled in the details of his simple existence. It was scarcely the life of the nineteenth century. It took one back rather to the placid days of country life in the time of Isaac Walton. The old man has lain a long five-and-twenty years now in the quiet village churchyard. Looking back, one wonders that such a character could have survived so far into this generation of haste and unrest.

CHAPTER VI

THE HERON

Herons maintain their plenty—Number of heronries—Those near London—Expert fishermen—Their diet—Heron hawking—A fine sport—Scott's mistake—Heron's foot legend—A moorhen devoured—Nesting habits—Rooks and herons—Ancient penalties for robbing heronries—Provincial names—A heronry in spring—A heron in captivity.

HERONS are among the most interesting relics of the wild England of the past; of the days when the surface of the greater portion of our country consisted of woodland, moor, or marsh; when the land teemed with strange beasts of chase, and the wildfowl held almost undisputed sway over league upon league of fen and waste. And although almost all our greater fauna have been crushed out of existence, and vast numbers of interesting wildfowl have been driven by cultivation or persecution from their ancient haunts, it is a pleasure to record the fact that the heron is still to be found in fair abundance throughout the length and breadth of the British Islands.

It is quite a mistake to suppose that herons and heronries are still decreasing. As a matter of fact, there can be little doubt that within the last hundred years they have certainly gained in numbers. The nesting-places of these birds are to be found at the present time in no less than forty-one counties in England and Wales. The number of heronries may be put down roughly at about 133, not including those

in Scotland and Ireland. Norfolk claims the largest number of heronries among English counties, boasting as it does of no less than fourteen of these curious nesting-places, while Yorkshire and Devon can count seven each. There are, indeed, few English shires which are not able to point to one or two of these ancient breeding resorts still in occupation; even near London we have heronries at Richmond Park, Wanstead, and Osterley Park. In James I.'s time, and even later, a heronry existed within the Bishop of London's domain at Fulham, and it is remarkable that spoonbills, now among the rarest of British birds, were to be seen nesting at the same place and in the same reign.

Herons, of course, from being expert fishermen, are a good deal out of favour with preservers of trouting streams. Although they devour at times frogs, toads, water-voles, and the young of wild duck, teal, moorhens, and other waterfowl, their main dietary consists of fish. It is therefore to the general credit of anglers and fish preservers that so few of these voracious birds are shot during the course of each season. As a matter of fact, we believe that most anglers have a sentimental affection towards the great grey heron, spite of its delinquencies. Even the hardened trout angler, in a country where streams are too often flogged to death, and decent, quiet fishing is hard to find, loves to see the great bird flapping leisurely across the landscape towards sunset, on its way homeward to some chosen resting-place. That the heron is really and truly a great devourer of fish is undeniable. The toll he takes each day from the district in which he is established must be very considerable. Years ago the stomach of a heron found dead by the water of Badenoch, near Drumlanford House, Scotland, was found to contain

From a photo by Major H. Moore.

YOUNG HERON FISHING.

From a photo by R. B. Lodge.

HERON: ADULT PLUMAGE.

no less than thirty-nine trout. Nicholas Cox, in his *Gentleman's Recreation*, published in Charles II.'s reign, mentions a "hern that had been shot at a pond" which had "seventeen carps at once in his belly." And the same curious writer avows that herons kept tame would eat "about fifty fish in a day, one day with another. And again," says Master Cox, "one hern that haunts a pond, in a twelve-moneth's time shall destroy a thousand store-carps; and when Gentlemen sue these ponds, they think their neighbours have robbed them, not in the least considering an Hern is able to devour them in half a year's time, if he put in half as many more." After which the author proceeds to give very precise instructions for the ensnaring and slaying of this unconscionable pond robber.

Still, with all his faults, English landowners and fishermen have a pardonable fondness for this picturesque bird; he is a link with the wild past which we can ill afford to spare, and so for the most part "Jack Hern" is allowed to go on his way unmolested, and to ply his angling career as and where he pleases.

Heron hawking, one of the choicest sports of our ancestors, is, unfortunately, now nearly a lost pastime. The well-known Loo Hawking Club, in Holland, however, so lately as about the middle of the last century, were in the habit of assembling at Loo each year for about six weeks, for the purpose of enjoying this excellent recreation. Peregrines and gerfalcons were employed, and capital sport was obtained. Mr. J. E. Harting, the well-known authority on falconry, has been at the trouble of dipping into the archives of the club. From his extracts it would seem that between 1840 and 1852 more than 1,500 herons were taken with hawks. The best years were 1841 and 1852. In the

former year 44 falcons captured 287 herons, while in 1852 36 falcons took no less than 297 of their long-billed quarry.

In the old days it is probable that our hawking ancestors usually flew their falcons at herons on their way home to the heronries. The falconers strove always to take advantage of the breeze, for the reason that if the heron got away down wind it was seldom killed. If the herons were forced to beat against the gale, excellent flights were obtained. The heron, when surprised by falcons, usually disgorged any fish that it might not have digested, and, thus disencumbered, often gave magnificent flights, ringing up into the heavens with a strong and sustained spiral ascent, so lofty that occasionally falcon and quarry vanished beyond the vision of the sportsman. The falcon struck its quarry usually in the back, and, "binding to," came to earth with it. The notion, immortalised by Scott in *The Betrothed,* that the hern was in the habit of impaling the falcon in its stoop upon its strong and sharp bill must, it is to be feared, be dismissed as a picturesque piece of fiction not occurring in real hawking. Yet it is undeniable that, when brought down, the heron was capable of inflicting dangerous wounds. Even men have been known to lose an eye from a stroke of the long, spear-like bill. Old hawking instructions directed the falconer, when the falcon had climbed to the hern and brought her down, to run in and rescue the hawk, thrusting the heron's bill into the ground, and breaking its wings and legs — a scandalously cruel practice.

The heron has marvellous digestive powers, and dissolves and assimilates the bones of its prey. The people of the Faröe Islands had formerly various quaint superstitions concerning this bird. One of

these, obviously evolved from the extreme respect with which they looked upon its angling powers, was that, if a fisherman carried in his pocket the foot of one of these birds, he would enjoy constant success in his craft, the theory being that fish were attracted by some odour of the foot as the bird stood in the water.

This bird is, as I have said, an omnivorous feeder, and will devour water-voles and even moorhens. Two or three years since a sportsman out with his keeper surprised a heron in the very article of bolting one of these waterfowl. A retriever was sent into the water after them, and the heron flapped off, bearing the moorhen in its bill. This it carried to a bare knoll at a little distance, and there swallowed it. Herons are good swimmers when they choose, and it is on record that one of these birds has been known to swim out to a moorhen's nest for the purpose of devouring the young ones.

There is a great deal of discrepancy about the nesting habits of herons. These birds usually lay from four to six eggs, but at times they seem to produce them very intermittently. Three eggs have, for instance, been taken from the same nest, one of which contained a well-grown young bird, the next a smaller bird, while the third was scarcely incubated. In the opinion of some observers herons hatch out three broods of young every season. That, however, I take it, is a scarcely normal state of things. In some heronries rooks destroy hundreds of eggs, and the herons there have been observed to go on laying from the beginning of March to the middle of May or later. I have seen a heronry close alongside a large colony of rooks, and I have no doubt that the herons suffered from the proximity of such thieving and marauding neighbours. Yet I could not discover that the herons, which are bold birds

enough when put to it, ever made any attempt to drive the rooks away from the same plantation.

By a statute of Henry VII.'s reign a fine of 10*s*. was laid upon any person taking the young of these birds from the nest, and 6*s*. 8*d*. for any person killing a heron out of his own grounds, except by hawking or by the long bow. By later enactments the penalty for taking eggs or the young was increased to 20*s*., or three months' imprisonment. I am not aware that these Acts have ever been repealed, but in any case herons are more or less protected by the Wild Birds Protection Acts of more recent times.

In Britain, as a rule, the grey heron builds in tall trees. Colonel Montagu, however, mentions having seen a heronry on a small island in a lake in the north of Scotland, where "there was only one scrubby oak tree, which not being sufficient to contain all the nests, many were placed on the ground." In South Africa, where our English heron is also found, these birds have been known to make their nests in company on tufts of grass and rushes in marshy places, sometimes surrounded by water.

Among provincial and local names for this bird are hern, heronshaw, crane (still the common Irish designation), heronswegh, hegrie or skiphegrie, and long-necked heron. The term "mollyern" I have mentioned in another chapter.

There is not a more interesting spectacle at springtime upon an English countryside than that obtained by the quiet watcher of a heronry during the breeding season. Not far from the Pevensey Marshes there is one of these ancient abiding-places, where herons can be observed pretty closely. The adjacent marshes between the heronry and the sea, full as they are of dykes and sluggish streams, swarming with eels, offer

excellent feeding-grounds, while upon other sides little rivers and rivulets, some of them holding excellent trout, serve to minister to the wants of the great fishing birds. Often during the pleasant Sussex springtime have we halted to watch these herons upon their nests. They are constantly going and coming; sometimes we have counted as many as fourteen or fifteen parent birds in and about the heronry. As the young ones increase in size the attentions of the old birds are very frequent, and at this time the amount of fish, eels, and frogs which they capture and carry to the nests must be exceptionally great. As one sits quietly watching, they come sailing in at intervals from all quarters. The flight is very majestic. Often they soar slowly round once or twice at a great height above the nests. As they drop, the vast wings are deftly folded inwards, so as to offer less resistance to the air. The inner parts show very dark as one watches this manœuvre. The bird sinks gently and with a wonderfully majestic grace till within ten or fifteen yards of the nest, when the long legs are lowered and the heron settles deftly among the branches. As it approaches, the young birds raise a hoarse, croaking cry—something like what might be conceived of a husky crow—and to this cry the old bird answers by one similar, but louder and stronger. The bird stays for a while upon the nest, and then, spreading its pinions, once more flaps off to the marshes in search of fresh food.

The Sussex peasants in the neighbourhood of this heronry—that of Windmill Hill, Herstmonceux—have the tradition that the herons always return thither for the nesting season on the first Sunday in February. This, of course, is a pleasing fancy, though it is firmly believed in by the old folk about Herstmonceux. Some of the earliest herons may begin to collect about that

period, if the weather is fair, but there is no hard-and-fast rule among these birds, which manifestly pair and gather by degrees for the nesting period.

The heron is very seldom seen as a pet or in captivity. A wild, shy, solitary creature, its habits scarcely render it a likely object for the attentions of mankind. Yet this last summer I heard of a singular instance of a heron striking up a friendship with human folk. Some Scottish friends of mine were up in the Highlands staying at an hotel. The two boys, wandering one day on the moor, came across a young heron which was wounded and unable to fly. After some manœuvring—for the heron is an awkward bird to tackle—they secured it and took it home. Arrived at the hotel, they put the sufferer into an old, disused omnibus which stood in the yard—a strange receptacle for such a bird—and there tended it. The young heron did well, and steadily recovered, and presently developed a strong friendship for its preservers, following them about more like a tame dog than a wild bird. After two or three weeks the wounded wing was healed, and one morning, on being let out of its resting-place, the bird took flight and sailed away. My friends all thought they had seen the last of it. Not so, however. That same evening the wanderer returned, and each day, while the party remained at the hotel, it duly winged its flight thither at evening. They left the place, and so late as November last the boys were delighted to hear from the hotel-keeper that the heron still returned nightly to its abode. This is almost the only instance with which I am acquainted of even the partial domestication of a bird of this species.

CHAPTER VII

RUFFS AND REEVES

Scarce British birds—Their visits—Reasons for their notoriety—Breeding plumage of the male—A strange transformation—"Hilling"—Battles royal—Breeding-places—Migrations—Old English haunts—Ruff catching—The fatteners—A costly delicacy—Mr. Town's journey—A forgotten table-bird—The fenman's lures—Food of these birds.

RUFFS and reeves, in the old days, before the vast fens of Lincolnshire were reclaimed from water, sedge, and mud, were quite familiar birds in England. Now they are seldom heard of. Their nesting haunts have been wrested from them, and the wild fenland, where the bittern once boomed in peace and the ruffs fought in springtime madly for the hen birds—the reeves—knows them as breeding birds no more. Yet it is not true to say that ruffs and reeves are extinct in this country. They visit us still every spring and autumn in their migrations north and south ; but their numbers are comparatively few, and they are seldom recognised among sandpipers, redshanks, greenshanks, and other wading birds to which they bear a strong family resemblance. Here and there, in some quiet piece of fen or marshland, still left to Norfolk, or elsewhere, a pair or two of ruffs and reeves may still nest and rear their young. But such instances are very rare, and from the gradual decline of fenland all over Britain are likely to become yet more infrequent. Ruffs and reeves have attained notoriety and favour

chiefly for two reasons—the extraordinary change in the plumage and appearance of the male birds during the courting and breeding season, and the great demand which anciently existed for the male birds at the tables of wealthy gourmets. So high was the estimation in which well-fattened ruffs were held during the days of our ancestors, that not only did the fenmen pursue and snare these birds systematically in their marshy haunts, but a regular business was carried on in one or two Lincolnshire towns in the feeding and fattening of them for table.

Out of the breeding season ruffs and reeves are much alike in appearance—the upper plumage variegated with brownish black and light rufous, the foreneck and breast pale reddish brown spotted with dark brown, the throat and stomach white. The legs and feet are yellow, the bill brown. The reeve is slightly paler than the ruff on the upper parts, the under parts are greyer, the bill and feet more dusky. During the spring the reeve is somewhat brighter in appearance. In size the ruff stands between the redshank and the greenshank, measuring a trifle under a foot in length. The reeves are perceptibly smaller, and average between nine and ten inches. As the spring comes in the ruff begins to assume a very different appearance. The changes of birds during the breeding season are, in different parts of the world, very wonderful. No transformation is, however, more remarkable than that of the ruff as the time for courting draws near. His face is then covered with singular fleshy tubercles, yellowish or pink in colour. Curious tufts of stiff plumage protrude themselves near either ear, and a large ruff of elongated feathers stands out over the neck. This ruff, from which the bird receives its name, is distensible at pleasure. The bill, legs, and feet are then yellow or

From a photograph by R. B. Lodge.

RUFF: BREEDING PLUMAGE.

From a photograph by R. B. Lodge.

RUFF: WINTER PLUMAGE.

orange colour. The colour of the plumage, and especially of the ear tufts and ruff, vary greatly, so that two birds are seldom found alike. The ruff is usually barred black, but in some individuals it is marked with white, brown, or grey. Metallic hues are often noticeable. Purplish black is more usually the colour of the ear tufts, while the general colour of the neck ruff is chestnut.

Young birds of the year, it is to be noted, do not display the ruff and other sexual changes of plumage and appearance. The assumption of this strange and beautiful breeding plumage is completed in May, and begins to vanish again towards the end of June. The deeper colours, such as purple and chestnut, disappear together, and by September the change is complete and the ordinary plumage regained. The female makes no pretence to anything in the shape of the ruff or ear tufts. During the courting season the ruffs, resplendent in their gay plumage, meet together on pieces of rising ground among the fens and marshes, and there battle together fiercely for the possession of the reeves. This practice was termed by the fenmen "hilling," and the turf and herbage were usually to be found beaten down by the movement of these birds during these contests. Besides these battles royal, the ruffs are in the habit of displaying their plumage, distending their ruffs, and performing various curious antics for the benefit of the admiring reeves, very much as does the peacock of Europe and Asia and the *paauw* or great bustard of South Africa. The eggs are usually laid in a tussock of grass; they are whitish green in colour, marked with reddish brown blotches, and are four in number.

The range of these birds is very large, as is so often the case with many of the wading birds. The bulk of the species breed mainly in Northern Europe and

Siberia, occasionally being found as far west as Iceland and even North America. Towards autumn they fare southward, visiting England and other parts of Europe; thence, seeking warmer regions, they pass into Africa, India, and even Japan. They migrate far south, and are familiar birds in South Africa, being found in Cape Colony as far south as the neighbourhood of Cape Town, as well as in Natal and many other parts of the country. Their appearance in South Africa usually coincides with the approach of the rainy season. From the nature of their food, which consists of insects, worms, and so forth, and from the shape of their longish bills, it is apparent that a moist soil and wet marshy localities are essentials to their existence. Ruffs and reeves are, whether in Europe or Africa, comparatively tame birds, and are usually to be seen in little flights of from three to a dozen. It is somewhat remarkable that the late C. J. Andersson, the well-known South African naturalist and traveller, shot three reeves in Damaraland (now part of German South-West Africa) during the month of August, and that remains of the somewhat brighter nuptial plumage were then visible. It would seem probable that these birds had not passed to Europe or Asia for the spring migration, but had remained and bred in some part of Africa. Andersson himself seems to have had the idea that some of them remained during the breeding season in the neighbourhood of Lake Ngami. Amid the vast swamps and river systems of that country there is certainly ample solitude for nesting purposes. During the last century, when ruffs and reeves were still comparatively plentiful in England, their haunts seem to have been chiefly in the fens of Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, the Isle of Ely, the East Riding of Yorkshire, and the Somersetshire fens near Bridgwater. Colonel Montagu, the well-known

ornithologist, to whom we are indebted for much of the lore concerning these birds, made special journeys in the fen country at the beginning of last century for the purpose of collecting information about them. By the year 1812 he found that they were, in consequence of the drainage of the fens, becoming much more scarce, and even in his time their haunts in Lincolnshire were chiefly restricted to the north fen, near Spalding, and the east and west fens, between Boston and Spilsby.

Ruff catching had, during the progress of centuries, become a fine art among certain of the hardy fenmen of Lincolnshire. The very habitations of these men were but little known to the outside world, and the fatteners who lived at Spalding, Cowbit, and elsewhere took good care to keep the secrets of their lucrative trade as much as possible to themselves. They were, of course, jealous of any interference or inquiry, and refused stoutly to reveal the names of the fen-fowlers or to make known their dwelling-places. A stranger, unless he were of the most pertinacious and inquiring disposition, might therefore as well search for a needle in a bundle of hay as hope to find out the haunts and habits of the fowlers plying their lonely vocations in the dreary and unknown wastes of the old fenland. The fatteners usually paid the fenmen a trifle under a shilling apiece for the birds brought to them, and made very large profits from their customers. Two guineas a dozen seems to have been quite an ordinary charge for fattened ruffs. A well-known feeder of ruffs at the beginning of the nineteenth century was Mr. Towns, of Spalding, whose family had then been engaged in the business for a century. They had supplied George II. and many great families with these notable delicacies. Mr. Towns once undertook, says Montagu, "at the desire of the late Marquis of Townshend, when that

nobleman was Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, to take some ruffs to that country, and actually set off with twenty-seven dozen from Lincolnshire, left seven dozen at the Duke of Devonshire's at Chatsworth, continued his route across the kingdom to Holyhead, and delivered seventeen dozen alive in Dublin, having lost only three dozen in so long a journey, confined and greatly crowded as they were in baskets, which were carried upon two horses." Surely a notable feat this in the supply of gastronomic rarities!

One never hears at the present day of a man who has so much as tasted one of these delicious birds properly fattened for the table. Probably the rude peasants of northern Scandinavia, or Russia, Lapps, Finns, Samoyeds, and the denizens of the dreary tundras of Siberia, are the only European or Asiatic people who now taste these once highly prized birds. To such rude palates, what a casting of pearls before swine! A good many gunners set eyes on ruffs and reeves in South Africa. There, however, the males having lost their remarkable breeding plumage, the ruffs as well as their females pass almost unrecognised among redshanks, greenshanks, and innumerable other wading birds, and are neglected for wild duck, geese, widgeon, teal, and other waterfowl. Ruffs were captured by the Lincolnshire fenmen in nets worked by long strings and pulleys, with the aid of decoy birds, sometimes stuffed specimens, but preferably living ruffs, fastened to the ground with a string about two feet in length.

Like most of the wading group, ruffs and reeves feed upon insects, worms, small crustaceans, and molluscs, in search of which they are to be seen eagerly delving in moist places with ever-busy bills. Their flight resembles the curlew sandpiper's more than that of any other bird; they are, however, somewhat larger than

that elegant wader, and fly more swiftly. It is probable that, during spring and autumn, when ruffs and reeves touch upon our coastline upon their migrations north and south, not a few are seen by shore gunners, and are by them mistaken for sandpipers or other well-known wading birds.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LANDRAIL

A familiar figure—Hard to retrieve when wounded—An excellent table bird—Its food—When the call ceases—Country names—The "king of the quails"—Period of migrations—Belated birds—Points of the landrail—Extraordinary migrants—Their range—From Greenland to Natal.

TO the September gunner the landrail is, of course, a familiar figure enough. During the first three weeks of partridge-shooting few bags, in almost any part of Great Britain, fail to include a specimen or two of this shy and secretive migrant. In truth, few typical partridge days would be complete without the sight of the curious bird which, rising slowly and clumsily from before the march of the gunners, with drooping legs, wings its heavy flight, apparently scarcely able to do much more than top the level of the corn stooks, or the piece of standing barley or beans from which it has been driven. The landrail is, of course, easily shot; but, unless killed, it is a most troublesome bird to pick up, giving even the seasoned and sagacious retriever, who knows its tricks and its dodging ways, an infinity of trouble. It has great powers of leaping, and when pursued by dogs is capable of jumping three or four yards. This is done "with closed wings and compressed feathers," manifestly for the suppression of scent, as far as possible, and, no doubt, many a landrail confuses the dog and makes its escape by this means.

Upon its first arrival in this country in April, the landrail is lean and in wretched condition. During the last few weeks of its sojourn, however, the bird, when secured by the September sportsman, will be found to be in excellent condition, plump and well nourished. And, as every partridge-shooter knows, or should know, there are few better tasted or more tender table birds than this timid migrant. The food of the landrail has, no doubt, something to do with its delicate and toothsome flesh. It is not a grain eater, although the seeds of different weeds are at times found among the contents of the stomach. Small shell-snails, slugs, black snails, tiny freshwater molluscs, worms, beetles, and even leaches, seem to form its principal food-supply. The gizzard is thick and muscular, and not only the fragments of snail shells, but often small pieces of grit and gravel are found in the intestines. These latter, and possibly even the crushed snail shells, no doubt, are aids to digestion.

Although familiar to the partridge-shooter, the landrail is a most retiring creature, and exposes itself with the greatest unwillingness to the gaze of mankind. If we except the gunner, by whom or by whose dog the bird is absolutely forced to take wing, how few are the people who can say they have ever seen a landrail in the flesh! The farmer and his men, during the spring and early summer months, and especially during the long days of May and June, are seldom, when they are afield, without the harsh and monotonous refrain from which this rail takes its other familiar name, the corncrake. Yet how many, even among the more observant of country people, can say that they have set eyes on a corncrake during May, June, July, or August? Towards July the landrail begins to cease

from its incessant call, and its presence, although of course the farmer well knows the bird and its family to be about his fields, would, by the uninitiated, be absolutely undreamed of.

In addition to its familiar British names, landrail and corncrake, this bird is also known locally as the daker-hen, land-hen, bean-crake, crek, and cracker. An old name for it in some counties was "king of the quails"; whether that name yet lingers here and there, now that the quail itself has become so scarce, I do not know. The name "king of the quails" was obviously bestowed upon the landrail for the reason that the period of its arrival in this country coincided exactly with that of the quails, both birds reaching these shores towards the end of April. Although the landrails mostly disappear from Britain on their southward migration during early October, here and there a survivor may be found which remains behind and braves the northern winter. In Ireland, probably from the milder climate of that island, these belated landrails are found more numerously than in England and Scotland during the winter months. In winter they frequent by choice deep ditches and other sheltered spots, and when chased by dogs will readily take to holes. Probably this bird can, in reality, stand an average winter much better than is generally supposed. It is, on the other hand, pretty certain that the landrail wintering in Britain must, like the woodcock, from the very nature of its food, suffer very severely during a really hard and prolonged spell of frost.

The sportsman, when one of these curious birds falls to his gun, as he tramps a piece of clover or "seeds" during a still September day, seldom fails to bestow something more than a passing look at the singular shape and handsome plumage of the landrail. As the

bird lies there upon your open palm, you may note easily its curiously short, feeble wings, set very far forward, and the strength, length, and development of its legs and feet. It is manifest that the bird is by nature far more fitted for running than flying. The clear hazel eye, the yellowish white stomach, the dark brown upper plumage, fringed with pale rufous, the rich deep chestnut of the quills and wing feathers, the pale ash of the breast and neck, and the faint tawny markings of the sides and thighs—all these points are pretty sure to catch the eye of the sportsman, if, as more often than not happens, he is something of a naturalist as well as a gunner.

The most remarkable thing about the landrail is, however, after all is said and done, its extraordinary instinct or passion for migration. Whence comes to it that overpowering desire which, twice in the year, impels it, weak-winged though it is, to change its quarters, to range during our English springtime as far north as the bleak and frozen shores of arctic Greenland, to descend in the fall of the year away south into Africa, and eastward into Asia, reaching in its return migration countries so distant and so widely sundered as Natal and Afghanistan? At present—in spite of theories and surmises—we have no satisfactory reason offered to us for the wonderful migration—recurring steadily, persistently, and unfailingly, year after year—of a bird like the landrail, whose weak wings and strongly developed legs plainly attest the fact that its natural powers of progression lie far more in walking and running than in flying. The extent of the migration of the landrail, although not yet perfectly ascertained, is reasonably well known. In its northern passage it reaches, during April and May, England, Scotland, Ireland, the Hebrides, the Orkney and Shet-

land Islands, the far Faröes—nay, even such solitary and remote Atlantic rocks as the lonely island of St. Kilda. It is well known in North Europe, resorting in its spring passage to Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. But, beyond even these migrations, there is established the fact that this feeble-winged creature, which in September seems scarcely capable of flapping heavily for thirty paces before the gunner, can and does summon up powers of flight sufficient to carry it across stormy and trackless seas as far north as Greenland and as far north-west as the Bermudas and the eastern shores of North America. Wonderful as are the facts and records of migration, the case of the homely landrail is certainly one of the most remarkable among the instances of this overpowering instinct.

Quitting our British fields, as I have said, towards the beginning of October, the landrail seeks light, warmth, and a fresh variety of food southward and eastward over a sufficiently wide expanse of country. Touching here and there—as it does in its spring migration—various countries in the south of Europe, it proceeds to take up its winter quarters in North Africa, Palestine, and Asia Minor, penetrating eastward certainly as far as Afghanistan. Beyond Afghanistan its range seems limited, only one instance of the landrail having been recorded in India. In its African migration it is manifest that, although not yet identified in the central part of the continent, it does pass southward right through the heart of the country. The well-known naturalist Mr. T. Ayres identified many specimens years ago in Natal, and its presence there is well known. Curiously enough, only a single specimen has been recorded in the Cape Colony. Mr. E. L. Layard, in his excellent *Birds of South Africa*, makes mention of this particular example, which was killed on

the Cape Flats, near Wynberg, as far back as 1864. It may be pointed out, however, that, as a whole, Cape Colony is a much drier country than Natal, and must therefore offer less hospitable quarters to a bird of the landrail's habits.

The gunner, then, carelessly picking up the humble, creeping landrail, and putting it among the partridges of his September bag, may well give a thought to the curious lot and instinct of this shy and unpretending bird. The feathered creature that lies in his hand dead this morning might, but for that charge of shot, have spent its winter far away south in savage Africa, or haply even have winged its flight next spring as far north as inhospitable Greenland.

CHAPTER IX

THE COMING OF THE WOODCOCK

The October migration—Mountain shooting in the west of Ireland—The November passage—Exhausted birds—Flight made by night—Woodcocks and lighthouses—English shooting—"Cock" in the Western Isles—Great Irish bags—The frost of 1881—Flint-and-steel records—Woodcock-shooting—Weight of woodcock—Comparative scarcity—Mediterranean slaughter—Nesting in Britain—Spring migration—Some observations in Denmark—Reported woodcock in South Africa.

OCTOBER is the month when woodcock, retreating from the bitter winter of northern Europe, bethink themselves of making their way, after their long sojourn in higher latitudes, to the milder climate of our sea-girt isles. And especially to the west of Ireland, where winter has less terrors and better feeding for them than any other part of the United Kingdom, do they direct their flight. At the end of October woodcock begin dropping in in small numbers. Gunners who know their ways expect to find a few here and there towards the close of this month, about the more sheltered mountain-sides of Mayo, Connemara, and other parts of Ireland. And with a dog that understands its business and a man who knows the habits of these game and their haunts—and woodcock are singularly faithful, as it were by tradition, to favoured spots—some very interesting sport can be picked up in a modest way about the lonely but marvellously picturesque mountain interiors of the west of Ireland.

The main migration of these birds sets in usually in

November, and as soon as sharp weather begins on the Continent and northerly and easterly breezes blow, woodcock begin to reach our shores in large numbers. If the wind is favourable—and preferably they fly with it on their beam—they arrive in pretty good fettle, and so pass on, after a short sojourn in the nearest coverts, to more desirable quarters. But not seldom they may have, from a sudden shift of wind, or rising of a gale, to buffet against weather that tries severely even their powers of flight; so that, on reaching our east coast, they lie completely exhausted and may be taken by hand. Years ago such a thing actually happened in the streets of Southwold, in Suffolk, and the birds have been noticed dropping in the churchyard, and even the very streets of Rye. Quite decent bags can even now occasionally be made after a sudden migration of woodcock upon our east coast by those who understand their habits and take advantage of their opportunities. But the woodcock so speedily moves on, after resting and recruiting itself, after its long flight, that not an hour should be lost on the receipt of tidings that these birds are in the neighbourhood. It has been well said that "Here to-day, gone to-morrow" is the woodcock's motto. Certainly it describes very aptly the habit of these birds. If, therefore, cock are reported in your coverts, stand not upon the order of your shooting, but go after them at once. In twenty-four hours—nay, in half a dozen hours—the birds, upon which all British gunners set so great a store, may have vanished, *tenues in auras*.

Cock make their flight hither almost always by night, and the evidence received from keepers of various lighthouses, who are accustomed to pick up regularly and report the bodies of birds killed by striking against their huge and powerful lanterns, goes to prove that

the favourite time of flight lies between midnight and the hour of daybreak. When in full flight, the pace at which woodcock progress, on a favourable wind, must be very great. In the year 1796 the lighthouse-keeper upon the Hill of Howth, near Dublin, was startled by a violent blow against the glass of his lantern. He found the plate-glass, more than three-eighths of an inch in thickness, broken. Outside on the balcony he picked up the unfortunate woodcock, which, attracted by the strong light, had caused the mishap. Such had been the enormous force of the impact that its bill, head, breast-bone, and both wings were all shattered.

Even in England, as I have said, good bags of woodcock have been occasionally made on the morning after a strong flight of these birds. At Spurn Point, for instance, as many as sixty have been shot in a single morning, following a fresh north-east breeze and a night of drizzling rain; while at Skegness forty-three were bagged on the same morning, undoubtedly from the same migration. Cornwall and Devon are favourite counties with cock, and in the neighbourhood of the Land's End as many as fifty-four woodcock have been shot by a single gunner in the course of a week. Thirty-nine woodcock were bagged during the same migration by a single gunner during the course of the day. The Western Isles of Scotland, with their mild, frostless climate, are often favoured resorts of woodcock. On the island of Mull, for example, two years ago, two sportsmen secured 326 cock, among other game—snipe, golden plover, wild geese, etc.—during the winter's shooting, by no means a contemptible bag for these days. Of these, 154 were secured in nine days' shooting, in wild weather, on steep hillsides and among rocks and cliffs. But it is to the west of Ireland, after all, that one must look for the notable records of

sport with these handsome and most delicious birds. The finest woodcock coverts of the Emerald Isle are, undoubtedly, those at Ashford, near Cong, county Galway, belonging to Lord Ardilaun. Here phenomenal bags are made. In 1899 the score of woodcock for six days of January shooting was 400 birds, besides pheasants and other game; 168 cock were bagged by seven guns in a single day. In January, 1880, six guns shot in the same coverts 360 cock in four days, killing in a single day 165 birds. In 1884 six guns bagged 172 cock in one day's shooting, while in 1886 the same number of guns secured no fewer than 177 woodcock in the course of one short winter's day.[1]

One of the best season's bags in Ireland of late years must be that on the Duke of Abercorn's estate of Baron's Court, county Tyrone, in the winter of 1894–5, when no less than 646 cock were shot.

Muckross, near Killarney, is a very favourite resort of woodcock. Here, in ten days' shooting, Lord Elcho and his party, averaging five guns, secured in ten days' sport 840 cock, an extraordinary bag. Woodcock were, in modern times, never so numerous on the west coast of Ireland as in the tremendous frost of January, 1881. Driven apparently to this milder region from almost every other portion of the United Kingdom, they were slain in holocausts. "Every hedgeway, every ditch and bunch of furze," says Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey (*The Fowler in Ireland*), "held its couple or more of cock. About the cliffs near the sea a dozen might often be seen on the wing at once." Every peasant went

[1] Cock-shooting in these coverts seems to have steadily improved. In 1895 the week's bag at Ashford amounted to 508 head of these birds, while in January and February of the present year (1904) no less than 544 woodcock were bagged by eight guns in the six days' shooting. This is a wonderful record, which, I believe, has never been surpassed. In one day of this great week, February 1st, 211 cock were slain.

out, armed with any old gun that he could raise by hook or crook, and slew woodcock to his heart's content. The great slaughter lasted throughout the whole of January, and, for an entire week, woodcock were to be bought for from 4*d.* to 6*d.* a couple. High times these for gourmets truly! During this period a single dealer forwarded to Dublin and London 1,000 woodcock a week for three weeks on end. And at this time Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey himself once counted 800 of these birds laid out on benches—surely a very memorable sight, even for so seasoned a sportsman among wildfowl and gamebirds.

A friend of mine, who was in the west of Ireland at this period, tells me that the hooded crows had an extraordinary time of it among the woodcock, hunting down the starved and enfeebled birds with the greatest ease and killing and devouring them by scores. In this way alone hundreds of woodcock must have been untimely slain during that unexampled frost.

Our ancestors, armed only with the old flint-and-steel weapon, made very good bags with this bird. In 1796 Mr. Yea, of Swansea, killed a hundred couple in one season. The Earl of Clermont, about the same period, for a bet of 300 guineas, killed in one day fifty-one couple of cock, and could no doubt have shot many more, as he had won his bet before three o'clock. The Earl picked his own day, and there must have been a great flight of cock, as at that time, near Ballyshannon, Donegal, the birds were selling for a penny apiece, plus the cost of powder and shot. To the average shooter these phenomenal bags of cock are of course unknown. The addition of two or three couple of these much-prized birds to the bag is, in the case of 95 per cent. of English shooting-parties, matter of keen congratulation, even in a part of the country where cock

WOODCOCK-SHOOTING—OLD STYLE.
(From an old print.)

PLATE VII.

are known at times to be found. Who can ever forget the first cock which, wavering shadow-like through the trees and thicket, fell one hardly knew how, to his snap shot? Who can, even after years of shooting, hear without a thrill the cry of "Mark cock!" as it resounds amid the copses?

I am inclined to think that the actual difficulty of killing cock has been overrated. The thick covert amid which the bird so often rises, and the impossibility of getting anything like a fair shot at him, is, I think, chiefly answerable for the number of misses with this game. Over-anxiety, too, or flurry, have much to do with the want of success. On the west coast of Scotland, where cock are shot much more frequently upon open ground, the percentage of misses is not extravagant. But in covert you never know when or where the long-billed bird will rise. He may be flushed from the gnarled roots of old trees, or be beaten from a bit of wild holly—a very favourite sitting-place, by the way— or he may rise under your very feet in the bracken, or in fifty other ways. If you mean to kill your woodcock you must snap him—if you can—the moment you set eyes upon him. In covert, the man who hesitates and dallies is lost—or rather the bird is. And it is to be remembered that in cock-shooting you cannot beat your ground too closely. In hard weather, if there are cock about, you may be pretty sure to find them by the soft ditches and streamlets that intersect parts of the covert. It is astonshing how quickly these birds will put on fat. The woodcock has with one exception—the locust-bird of South Africa (Nordmann's Pratincole)—perhaps the quickest digestion and the most extraordinary power of assimilating food of any living creature. A cock that alights starved and exhausted from its long passage will in a very few days

be fat and in high condition, provided the surroundings are favourable, and its natural food—worms, larvæ, small beetles, and other insects—abundant.

A well-grown woodcock will weigh about 12 ounces, but fine specimens are occasionally shot reaching as much as 16 and 18 ounces. Yarrell records a cock which scaled as much as 27 ounces, but that must have been a veritable giant and phenomenon even for the old and good days. Our forefathers seem to have called these inordinately heavy specimens "double woodcock," but "double woodcock" have long vanished into the limbo of the past, with dragons, giants, fairies, and other fabled creatures.

Here and there in favoured parts of England cock are, as I have shown, at certain seasons to be found in fair numbers. But life itself is not more uncertain than their visitations, and in many localities where once they appeared in some abundance they are now seldom seen. I was speaking some twenty years back to Archdeacon Philpott, who died no great while since well on to his hundredth year. In his youth the Archdeacon had been a keen sportsman. He told me that at the beginning of the last century he remembered cock being exceedingly plentiful on the coast of Suffolk, in the neighbourhood of Southwold. Occasionally, in good years, a fair number of cock are shot in Norfolk and Suffolk, in the coverts of the King, Lord Rendlesham, Lord Hastings, and other landowners. But as a whole the east coast affords nothing like the plenty of bygone times. It is not difficult to account for the increasing scarcity of these most desirable of all sporting birds. The number of gunners has enormously increased all over Europe in the last fifty years, and in the very nature of things cock cannot be preserved in the same manner as non-migratory game, like

partridges and pheasants. In the Mediterranean the slaughter by gunners among these migrants has been enormous, so enormous as to influence undoubtedly the numbers of these birds that annually fare northward to nest in colder climates. British yachtsmen have for generations past taken an immense tribute from woodcock on the shores of Greece, Albania, and other favourite localities. So far back as the year 1844, Admiral Sir Hyde Parker, Colonel Parker, and a few friends were shooting from their headquarters in the *Louisa* yacht on the classic shores of the Morea and Thessaly, often killing scores of cock within sight of Pelion, Ossa, and Olympus. Their bag was immense. In six days' shooting, for instance, they killed 1,026 woodcock; the two best days yielded 196 and 193 birds respectively. Sport with such game and amid such surroundings must have been enjoyable indeed! On the other hand, the woodcock bagged in these localities are not usually to be found in such high condition as a bird fattened amid British feeding-grounds. Such, at least, is the opinion of the majority of Mediterranean sportsmen. There is still good woodcock-shooting to be obtained in the Mediterranean, during winter, by those who know the ropes and are acquainted with the best grounds; but the wonderful sport of the middle of the last century is not now to be expected.

A fair number of woodcock nest in this country, especially in some of the southern counties, where large coverts afford them sanctuary. If cock-shooting were by law compelled to cease at the same period as pheasant-shooting, there can be little doubt that the further period of repose and quiet would induce many more of these birds to breed in these islands than is now the case. In some counties these birds are protected from the 1st March, but in others shooting con-

tinues till the 15th March. The hen woodcock sits on her eggs three weeks, and often nests very early, and it is obvious that a general close season, beginning with the 2nd day of February, would be of immense benefit to breeding birds.

The departure of the great body of woodcock from these shores to the North of Europe, for nesting purposes, varies a good deal with the weather. In mild March weather they begin to depart fairly early in that month; if the season is inclement and the winds are adverse, the main body of the migration hang back until more favourable weather sets in. As a rule, most of the woodcock have left our coast by the middle of April at latest. An account of the migration of these birds into and through Denmark appeared in the *Field* of the 31st April, 1902. It seemed to me so interesting that I have reproduced it.

"Until the end of February wintry weather prevailed throughout central Europe; then the cold began to give somewhat, and the woodcock made their appearance before the middle of March in Denmark on their way north. In the latter half of that month, however, the temperature again fell, and until the end of April the wind blew almost uninterruptedly from the north and east, with heavy snow and hail in parts and a good many degrees of frost, especially at night; the consequence was that the birds made but slow progress, and the Danish sportsmen secured a considerably larger number than usual. Besides having a distinct predilection for flying with the wind, the woodcock, during their migration, do not like to have water beneath them more than they can help; they prefer islands and peninsulas where, when exhausted or hungry, they may rest and feed. Flight after flight arrived from the south, taking advantage, according to their wont, of the natural bridge across the Baltic, Cattegat, and Skagerak, formed by Jutland, Fyen, and Zeeland; there they met the bitter blasts from the north and east, and there they remained, much to the delight of

the worthy Danes. Another noticeable result of the prevailing wind was the deflection of large numbers of the birds to the westward of their usual route, and many of the districts on the eastern coasts which are recognised as favourite resting-places came off relatively second best.

"Curiously enough, the first cock were observed on March 9th in the neighbourhood of Frederikshavn, one of the most northern parts of the country; whether they came from England over the sea or across the Jutland Peninsula it is, of course, impossible to say. In other quarters no others were seen until nearly a week later, but the birds could, of course, have made the journey in one night either from Germany or the British Isles. On the 14th the members of a small flight, which must have arrived during the previous night, were fallen in with near the Mariager Fjord (also situated in North Jutland); but the first really big flight reached both the islands and Jutland on the night between March 15th and 16th, and the next day cock were everywhere in evidence. During the next few days more no doubt came from the south, but only singly or in small lots; and on the 21st and 22nd a considerable number reached certain districts, notably North Zeeland and that part of North Jutland which lies between the Mariager and Limfjord. On the night of March 28th and 29th the second large flight reached the islands and Jutland; these remained weather-bound and more came the last night of the month. But during the night between April 3rd and 4th the largest flight of the season turned up, and reports from all over the country showed the birds to be plentiful. A pause in the arrivals then ensued, but on the night April 13th and 14th another big lot put in an appearance, and until the 20th a number of them were shot.

"Speaking generally, the season may be said to have been above the average, but in all the woodland tracts usually resorted to by these migrants they were not numerous; some of these were favoured, but more birds than usual were shot beyond the limits of such districts. Thus, throughout the whole of South Jutland, as far as the Bay of Aarhus, the birds were certainly not more numerous than in an average year. But in Djursland, especially the more

northern woods, there were more than usual. It may incidentally be remarked that the introduction of pheasants (which has proved a great success) into Denmark undoubtedly saves the lives of a good many woodcock, as the owners do not care to disturb coverts occupied by the former birds at the time of year when the latter are migrating northwards. "L."

Early last year (1903) it was reported in the *Field* that a woodcock had been shot in the Transvaal, and that the identity of the bird had been thoroughly attested. Far and wide as this splendid bird migrates over the face of the earth, no woodcock has ever before been shot in South Africa, or, indeed, ever identified from any locality in the Dark Continent south of the equator. I believe that once at least previously this bird has been reported in South Africa, but its presence there has never been successfully established. In the present instance the woodcock, said to have been shot near Standerton, is stated to have been vouched a true British bird (*Scolopax rustica*) by six British officers. It will be interesting, indeed, if this report is correct. Our English woodcock is known in Persia, India, Ceylon, China, North Africa, and occasionally even on the eastern littoral of North America. There is no real reason why it should not attain to South Africa, and it will be a matter of keen pleasure to all ornithologists if this fact should be successfully established.

CHAPTER X

A FOX-HUNT IN THE DOWNS

Leaving kennel—Over the down slopes—Seagulls—A quiet hamlet—The meet—The find—A rousing gallop—The fox reappears—A transformation—Hounds in view—A check—The huntsman's cast into covert—The beaten fox—An invincible determination—The unfriendly plough—A game beast of chase—The death.

THE kennels lie snugly at the foot of one of those great smooth hills of grass which stand sentinel above the Channel upon the Sussex shore. It is ten o'clock, and the hounds are just quitting their enclosure. They stream through the gate held open for them by one of the whips and pour out upon the grass slope, all mad with pleasure and excitement at the prospect of a whole day of liberty and a fox chase or two thrown in. It is a short hour's ride to the meet, and huntsman, whips, and pack climb leisurely the slope of the great down which in smooth contour stands above them. It has been a night of frost, but already the sun is asserting his strength; the white rime that met his rays is already turned to moisture; every leaf of the short herbage glistens, and there will be abundance of scent for some hours. The three figures in red show up bravely upon the hillside, as they rise obliquely the six hundred feet of down, and the sun flicks keen flashes of light from spur and bit. That smooth grass path which they are ascending has been worn for them by the patient feet of Saxon hinds, who for a thousand years have followed it. Presently

hunters and hounds stand out in clear outline upon the brow and then disappear.

We climb the hill steadily, and in turn are upon the summit. The hounds are far ahead now and will soon be descending again. The sun is busily licking up the white mist which lies in the hollows beneath, and the broad expanse of smooth, rolling down-country is every minute becoming more clear to the eyes. In the valley just below a great company of gulls has been sheltering during the night. They are preparing to descend for breakfast upon some ploughing which skirts the hills to the right, and as they rise upon the wing the sun tints with silver the delicate pearl-grey of their upper plumage. We push on and now descend a steep slope of the down, where the sun has not yet made himself felt, and the rime lies thick and frosty upon the longer herbage. Another mile or two, and we are at the meeting-place—a quiet hamlet, lapped in one of those warm, well-timbered coombs which lie amid the spurs of the South Downs. Fifteen minutes in front of a pleasant, spacious, comfortable-looking country-house; cherry brandy or ale for those who fancy it; conversation, which, despite the hard times, sounds cheery enough; and then the word is given and hounds are trotted away to the woodland close at hand.

The squire here is a keen fox-preserver, and not five minutes elapse before the whimper of a single staunch hound has proclaimed a find; the whimper quickly swells to a chorus, and then, in full cry, the whole pack break covert and face the long, sloping shoulder of down which stretches above them. A quarter of a mile in front you may note a small, solitary patch of brown moving swiftly and very smoothly over the dull green grass. That is the fox they are now in frantic

PLATE VIII. FOX-HUNTING IN THE DOWNS. From a photograph by J. Coster.

pursuit of. After the hounds thunder the field, some seventy or eighty in number. They gallop slowly, for the down is not to be lightly overcome. In ten minutes fox, hounds, and hunters have vanished over the smooth brow.

Twenty minutes later, down another shoulder of the big, rounded hill, comes stealing that same little red-brown figure. The time has been brief enough, but the wonderfully easy, machine-like stride with which the fox faced the down so short a time since has changed, and the gait is now strangely slow and laboured. In truth, fox-hunting upon these smooth hills, where there are no enclosures, no fences, and often little or no shelter for miles, is very hard upon the hunted beast, which is here as much coursed by the hounds as hunted. In twenty short minutes that fox has been practically run to death. He makes for the woodland from which he was driven, but there are foot-people between it and him, and he turns short round and canters wearily over a piece of plough, pointing for a patch of plantation under the hollow of the down. A chorus of yells, halloos, and screams from the foot-people somewhat hastens his progress. He rests but three minutes in the plantation patch, and then steals softly to another, and thence into the big covert again, almost at the spot from which he first broke.

A blast of the horn floats cheerily across the valley, and now upon the line of the hunted fox, down the shoulder of the hill, come streaming hounds and hunters again. The pack work round to the plough and there check. The huntsman casts them to the right without result, and then, after some few minutes' delay, he is informed of the fox's point, blows his horn, carries his hounds forward, and is upon the line again. They hunt slowly under the hill, the sun has told upon

the ploughing, and scent is poor and catchy. In five minutes they have run through the plantations through which their hunted fox passed. They plunge into the woodland again and are hidden from view. Five minutes later, and the beginning of the end comes. Once more from the covert there emerges that little reddish brown figure which we have seen twice before. It creeps wearily out on to the plough for a hundred yards, and then there is once more a hubbub of yells from the foot-people. Everybody has caught sight of the chase. Almost in the same instant a crash of hound music comes from the covert, and the pack issues into the open again. They seem fresh enough, while the little, draggled, weary figure out there upon the middle of the ploughing can now scarce lift one leg after another. You may have seen many a well-hunted fox; never have you set eyes upon a more beaten one than that before you. The tillage rises a little in the centre; it is all open ground, and the end of the chase is in full view of every one, mounted or on foot. Yet beaten, wearied to death, utterly hopeless as he must now be, the hunted creature steals, with an invincible determination, stiffly forward.

For a little way the pack follows steadily upon the line, gaining fast; suddenly a leading hound views a hundred yards in front the beaten fox. He raises his voice in frantic delight; the rest of the pack in turn catch sight of their prey, and now, ravening together, they dash forward, with a crash of voices, with renewed pace and vigour. The fox knows now that the end is very near, yet he still holds his head straight and presses on. The sight, even to the hardened fox-hunter, is almost a pathetic one. Here is no friendly ditch, no bush, no shelter of any kind, where the hunted creature may set himself up at the last and die at least

with his back to the wall. All is bare, inhospitable, and open. The pack flashes forward, one hound three lengths ahead of his fellows. He is within three yards of his prey. The fox suddenly faces round, with open mouth and bared teeth; the big hound grapples him fiercely, receiving a nasty bite as he does so; in another instant the whole pack are mingled in one wild delirium; the death has come. The huntsman gallops up, jumps off his good chestnut, rescues the dead and now tattered quarry, and, with the field gathered round him, proceeds to conduct the last rites in due form.

Why, one asks oneself, instead of seeking the vale, where fences are in plenty, sheep abound, and the chances of escape are increased a hundredfold, did that fox climb the bare down and suffer himself in that first twenty minutes' burst to be practically coursed to death? That is a question impossible even for the huntsman to answer. Perchance he sought a refuge in the cliffs, which he found himself unable to attain; perchance he was turned from the valley by foot-people outside the covert. Whatever his reasons, and no doubt he had good vulpine reasons for the line he took, the smooth, bare hills proved his undoing. He was a stout fox, and in an average hunting county would probably have stood before hounds for a long hour, or even have made good his escape altogether.

CHAPTER XI

TWO HARE-HUNTS

A South Down homestead—An old-fashioned pack—Four hares afoot—A check—Across the golf links—Slow hunting—Away over the downs—A straight-necked hare—The kill—A record hunt—A Marsh Meet—The hare-finder—A good run—Towards the sea—The Crumbles—The death—A second hunt—Fifty minutes and a kill—Homeward.

A BRIGHT, sharp-set morning in February, with a keen northerly wind. There is the merest powdering of snow on the downs, which is not, perhaps, of the happiest augury for hunting. Still, I have known hounds run like wildfire in frost and snow; one of the charms and the mysteries of scent is that you never know what fortune may have in store for you. We meet this morning at a comfortable South Down homestead—Meads Farm—within half a mile of Beachy Head. At eleven o'clock the Hailsham Harriers, a famous old Sussex foot-pack, appear on the scene, seventeen couple of them, all, as is their wont, in excellent heart and fettle. The Hailsham have a strong blend of the old Southern hound blood. They average about nineteen inches, and are notable for their first-rate scenting powers, long ears, deep voices, and a strain of that excellent but now rare blue-mottle marking, which shows prominently throughout the pack.

Hares, happily, are plentiful in all this countryside, and hounds have been drawing no more than three or four minutes when up jumps puss from the plough and speeds away behind us. The pack at once gets

a view, and with a wonderful burst of music rave after the little brown form fleeting away in front of them. They run in the direction of Eastbourne; scent is at present extremely catchy, and after ten or twelve minutes' chase they check at the road near some water-works and are at fault. What became of this hare no man can say. She has been clever enough to elude the pack, and after a long and careful cast or two the master gives it up and harks back westward to find a fresh hare. We have a somewhat large field out, including a couple of score of enthusiastic schoolboys, and at present huntsman and hounds have scarcely had room and margin enough for fair hunting. However, that drawback will have speedily vanished, so soon as hounds get a fair start and settle thoroughly to their work.

Working a little to the right hand, we draw a piece of plough, where no less than four hares are afoot. The pack divides upon two of these, and, with a glorious duet upon the clear wintry air, away flings the chase. We follow the main body of the pack, which now, drawing well clear of the foot-folk, drive steadily upon the line, across the East Dean road, and sink a grassy valley, down the bottom of which they presently push their game in first-rate fashion. We have now sorted our field. The mere sightseers have vanished; only a score or so of keen foot-hunters, including a lady or two, the schoolboys—bareheaded and in football kit for the most part—and some masters, are within hail. Two mounted men accompany hounds, our master, on a useful grey, and a farmer. In their own peculiar country—about Pevensey Marshes, Herstmonceux, and Hailsham—these harriers are invariably hunted on foot. When they visit the downs, where hares run very wide and very far, and hounds get

clean away from the foot-people, it is the custom to hunt them on horseback, the two whips, as usual, following on foot.

Our hare has turned, and hounds, swinging swiftly to the left hand, climb a gorse-clad bank, and reach some plough again. By this time the bright sunshine has had its effect; the snow has well-nigh vanished, and the country is as sticky and as holding as you please. Hard work for the foot-followers, who toil along, carrying with them at every stride no inconsiderable portion of the county. Scent suddenly fails, and across this piece of plough even these low-scenting hounds can make little or nothing of the line. However, there is a holloa forward by yonder rick. I know this is the right line, having seen the hare suddenly turn and bear across the plough in that direction. Now the master holds his pack forward. Suddenly, as they approach the line of the chase, a fresh hare jumps up in front of them, and with a frantic outburst away goes the pack, all running in view. Bad luck this, yet it may be cured. They hunt down the slope and up the hill on the other side, pointing for Friston. At the top there is a check; the master, aided by his mounted friend, gets them off, and they are brought back. By this time the errant hounds, which ran the other hare, have been retrieved, and we go to work with the complete chorus again.

Hunting testimony is always more than doubtful; two sets of people have, they say, seen the hunted hare in front of them; which of them are in the right? The master casts his hounds over the grass right-handed, and brings them round in a wide semicircle. No result! A lady and a schoolboy vow they have viewed the hunted hare up the plough on the downside yonder, just where a more than usually bright and

vivid green line of sprouting corn bisects the patch. Are they right? The master carries his hounds that way. In three minutes the lady and the schoolboy are triumphantly vindicated. The hounds burst into a chorus of beautiful and most cheery melody, and away we go again.

Now the hunted hare takes a sweep over the country between Jevington and East Dean, circles back to her old haunts, and then pushing past the field where she was originally seated, heads straight for Eastbourne. On the plough the scent is still catchy and inconstant, but it is improving. On the grass they run excellently, and the foot-people are perceptibly tailing. Presently we are on the down above Eastbourne. Hounds rave down the steep hillside, away over the upper end of the golf links, across the wide valley, and then, as hard as they can tear, so good is now the scent, streak up the wall-like side of down to the East Dean road. This we cross, and then forward away again for the Jevington Downs. Already the hunt has been a longish one—more than an hour and a half—the pace and the sticky state of the country are telling; less than a score of runners are now following, even among these the weeding-out process is steadily progressing. After a fine burst along the grass, we check on some more plough, and for the next twenty minutes some of the prettiest hunting of the day is witnessed. Scent has suddenly failed again, and hounds have much difficulty to carry the line forward. Never were four-footed creatures more busy; as a lesson in the absolute concentration of energy and of talent nothing could be more beautiful.

Hunting slowly over the ploughs, packed closely together, yet all at work, they nose out the puzzle set by that most cunning and resourceful beast of chase

in front of them, yard by yard, rod by rod. The master leaves them entirely alone, and his confidence is well repaid. Here the hare has evidently put in some masterly work, weaving a cunning foil, as these creatures will do. But hounds are not to be denied. They piece it all out magnificently. Now it is Champion, the black-and-tan hound; now Harebell, that beautiful pied bitch, flings her mellow note; now Stormer and old Wonder; now Ranji, that somewhat throaty hound—a throaty hound has always a good nose, mark you—leads the van.

Steadily our troubles are surmounted, the worst of the plough is past, scent improves, and once more away we go again. Another fold of the down is past; we descend a valley, away up the other side hounds stream through some gorse covert and push on furiously in straight, tail-on-end chase. We climb this hill, and see the pack below us, running with immense fire and freedom over the wide vale between Friston Place and Jevington. Up they go, and away we toil after them. Followers there are few. As we climb the steep down and look over towards Alfriston, Firle, and Wilmington, only the master, on his grey, is with the hounds. The foot-people have well-nigh vanished. There remain, still faithful followers of the fleeing pack, but the two whips, two men, and a single lady, the lady who viewed our hunted hare at that critical moment now long since. The spectators, the schoolboys, the schoolmasters, all, all have vanished. A countryman standing near us ejaculates, as we gaze over the wide vista of the hills, "I reckon they got on a fox in that there gorse; they be going so straight." And, in truth, if it is a hare we are still hunting, it is a rare straight-necked one. But a hare, our hunted hare, in very sooth it is.

Hounds follow hard towards Litlington, leaving on the left West Dean—that still remote nook of the South Downs, where Alfred the Great, long centuries ago, used, they say, to visit his friend and tutor, Rasse. Skirting Litlington, and leaving Alfriston just below, the now sinking quarry pushes on above the Cuckmere. Here the master, now alone with his pack, gets a view. He has satisfied himself by some curious work put in near here—the last effort of this stout and resourceful quarry—that it is indeed a hare he is on, and not a fox. Beyond the tiny church of Lullington—the smallest church in England some say—the end comes at last, and hounds, racing from scent to view, pull down the big jack hare which, for just upon three solid hours, has kept them going.

A grand hare hunt, indeed, the best of the present season[1] As hounds ran, some fourteen miles must have been accomplished; the point alone from Eastbourne Golf Links to the Cuckmere Valley, where they killed, is not far from six miles, as the crow flies. The two whips and one solitary follower straggle up and, leg-weary though they are, rejoice in the accomplishment of one of the longest and toughest hunts within their recollection. Two miles behind, from their Pisgah, the high down on which they stand, two solitary figures remain listening to the far melody of the hound voices, wishing themselves in the Promised Land yonder. The music suddenly ceases. The end has come; surely it is the death! Alas, would that they had struggled on to the finish of this wonderful chase! To-day the Promised Land is not for them.

Let me now picture a meet of the same hounds in their Pevensey Marsh country. It is a fine clear

[1] 1903–4.

December morning, with a sharp easterly breeze. Not, perhaps, an ideal wind for hunting, yet the day is so cheerful, and the countryside, under the pleasant wintry sun, assumes so fair an aspect, that all assembled at the village meet are in excellent spirits. Cycling across to the trysting-place, one looks over a wide expanse of marsh pastures, bounded on one hand by the sea, upon the other by a semicircle of low hills, which rise in the far distance. Upon these broad pastures, intersected by deepish dykes, now since the rains well replenished with water, graze prosperous-looking cattle. Their life is a quiet one, they live remote from mankind. A passing cycle or a cart they may see now and again upon the solitary road, but as a rule the hare, the heron, the pee-wit, a hawk or two, a few snipe, and wild duck and partridges, are their only neighbours. In winter, it is true, they are periodically excited by the doings of the harrier pack met together this morning, and the deep voices of hounds and the twang of the horn become pretty familiar.

Our meet is a small one, for our hounds are hunted on foot; ours is, happily, not a fashionable pack, and as a rule not more than a score or so of us assemble to follow the hare over the marsh country. On the other hand, sport is here almost invariably good; we have few interruptions from excited ignoramuses, who imagine that every hare they see is the hunted one; and we can enjoy to the full the wonderful pleasure of seeing hounds conducting their own hunting over a wide, wild landscape almost unaided.

Now we move from the village to the meadows trending towards the sea, and for ten minutes hounds hunt eagerly hither and thither in search of a line. Suddenly comes a quiet holloa from behind. Upon a little eminence amid the bright green pastures stands a man hold-

ing his hat in the air. We know his tidings to be unimpeachable, and, with a cheery blast from the master's horn, hounds are rapidly trotted back.

With nearly all harrier packs you will discover some one man who has the curious and very useful knack of finding hares. Our "finder" seldom fails us during a day's hunting, and when his hat goes up you may be absolutely certain that we shall have a run. Hare-finding is, in truth, a gift with which only a few men are endowed. This morning, as soon as our friend found his hare, he moved quietly aside as if he had not perceived her. She squeezed a trifle away from him, but did not quit her seat. If his eye had caught hers, she would most probably have jumped up and been away with too long a start. As it was, our judicious friend took care that his eye should not meet hers, and edged quietly away. Thus puss was inveigled and lay snugly in her form. But now hounds are within reasonable distance, and the hare-finder thinks it time to put up the quarry. She leaps from her warm seat, and with springy strides, speeds away as if she would never halt again. But we all know better.

Now hounds are up to the seat she has just vacated, and, with a glorious burst of music, the pack opens upon the warm scent. The hare has a fair start, and it is quickly evident that she is about to treat us to a ringing chase to start with. If she had jumped up in the middle of hounds, as not infrequently happens, she might have sustained such a fright as would have driven her clean away out of her accustomed country, and afforded a good straight run. Now and then, undoubtedly, a view is a capital thing for a pack and increases keenness; on the other hand, if hounds are of fox-hound blood and somewhat over-fast for their quarry, or if they are inclined to wildness, it is not always

desirable. But ours is a pack of true harrier blood, steady and well conducted, fast enough to kill hares, yet not so fast as to course them to death without a fair hunt. And whether the hare is viewed, or whether, as happens this morning, hounds are laid on after reasonable law is given, it matters usually very little.

It seems to make no difference at all to a hare—unlike the fox—whether she runs up or down wind. To-day our quarry runs fast down wind for half a mile, and then, turning somewhat abruptly, faces the easterly breeze, swings past the outskirts of the village at which we met, races swiftly past the grey and ivied walls of the old ruined castle of Pevensey and the ancient church adjoining, and, hieing to the open marshes, sweeps round presently in a ring. Hounds follow briskly, but, after executing an almost complete circle and coming back close to the hare's old seat, scent suddenly begins to fail them. Who shall explain or account for the mysteries of this most inexplicable of subjects? Just now at times the line seems absolutely to have vanished, and although they are on grass, the staunch hounds can make nothing of it. There seem to be vast gaps in the trail of the hunted hare, as though she had flown and not touched the ground with her feet at all.

However, with patience, we gradually make good the line, and for the second time complete the ring of this circling quarry. Now she has squatted, and, after some hunting about, she springs up almost within reach of some of the hounds, and bounds down a little grass lane with but a few yards separating her from the leaders of the pack. As she passes us, with ears laid flat back, we notice that she is travel-stained, and no longer moves with quite her early freedom. She has been running now close on forty minutes, and the grim, unrelenting chase is beginning to tell its inevitable tale.

From a photograph by J. Coster.

HARE-HUNTING ON FOOT—A CHECK.

PLATE IX.

This time the hare seems to have been thoroughly alarmed at her narrow escape, and, abandoning her ringing tactics, she pushes now in a straight line towards the sea. Putting on a tremendous burst of speed, she gets well away again from that hateful proximity, and presently moves on her course three hundred yards ahead of the clamouring pack.

Curiously enough, scent has marvellously improved again, and the chase now sweeps hotly across the pastures. Pursuing our course steadily over meadow and dyke, the latter sometimes jumpable, sometimes only to be crossed by aid of a kindly plank, we toil on in rear. At length we near a vast stretch of shingle, three miles long by half a mile broad, recovered by nature, centuries ago, from the sea which once whelmed it. A notable haunt this of ring-plovers and other birds. Over this distressing shingle it is clear the sinking hare has betaken herself, in the hope of finally baffling those inexorable pursuers. Vain hope! The pack are close up now: and, as they swing forward over yonder broad, gleaming stretch of beach, even there, upon that almost impossible surface for scent, the well-nosed hounds manage somehow to hold the line. Arrived at the middle of this pebbly plain the hare has shot her final bolt, and squats once more. The main body of the pack flash past, and for a few minutes are at fault. Not so three hounds, Woodman, Bounty, and Abel, which nose out the quarry, push her up once more, and after a few ineffectual turns seize and kill her. And so, betwixt sea and land, on this strange waste of shore, this stout hare yields up her life. Two men, at work hard by loading shingle, run up and save the dead quarry from being torn in pieces, and as we footmen reach the scene—there are only four of us at hand—one of the navvies

hands the now stiffening body to the master. Jim, our whip and kennel-huntsman, performs the obsequies, and with whoo-whoops and a blast or two from the horn the rites are concluded. A first-rate hunt in the old-fashioned manner. Time, 1 hour 13 minutes.

Quitting the sea, we once more strike for the marshes, and in a little while meet the rest of the field. Ten minutes later our pack is racing merrily as ever upon the scent of a fresh-found hare. Again ensues a capital and most interesting hunt of fifty-five minutes, at the end of which, after much devious and clever manœuvring to shake off the untiring pack, our second hare is run into and killed. Two long and hard runs and a couple of kills are, for a pack hunting six days a fortnight, quite enough, and although the afternoon is early, we adjourn, well content, to the village inn, where with sandwiches, bread and cheese, and divers drinks we satisfy the pangs of nature. It is a cheery gathering, and, after much conversation upon the events of the morning and a running accompaniment of hearty laughter, we separate and wend our ways homeward.

CHAPTER XII

A MAYO LAKE

Sport in county Mayo—Past and present—Romantic scenery—Clew Bay—A seven-mile trot—Lough Beltra—Neighbouring mountains—Search for a boat—"The best on the lough"—A leaky vessel—Ashore for another—Some good trouting—A fight with a sea-trout—More "white trout"—Habits of these fish—Scarcity of males—Feeding in fresh water—Evidences—Variances in brown trout—Some Norway examples—A fair bag—Ashore and homeward—Beautiful scenes.

WHO that has once fished in county Mayo in fine weather can ever forget it? Sport may not always be quite what it was in the great days when salmon and white trout swarmed, when the fisheries had not been half ruined by mismanagement, needy landlords, and ubiquitous poachers, and the angler was pretty sure of a heavy creel wherever and whenever he went out. Yet even now, despite many drawbacks, excellent fishing is here and there to be obtained, white trout are fairly abundant, while, as for brown trout, every lake, every river, every tiny stream that runs sparkling amid the glens and mountains of this lovely land is full of them. In the way of scenery, there is scarce a corner of the British Isles that can approach county Mayo, with its glorious mountains, its romantic valleys and passes, its wild moorland, its unrivalled coastline. The clean, soft air, fresh from a thousand leagues of virgin Atlantic, is perfection itself. There is nothing else quite like it, except,

perhaps, in adjacent Connemara. Leaving Clew Bay and its hundred islands behind us, we drive in the little governess-cart up a moorland road, no great way above the Newport River, which, finding an outlet from Lough Beltra, makes its short passage to the Atlantic. A seven-mile trot, and Beltra, a beautiful upland lake, set amid perfect solitude, lies shining before us. Beyond the lake rises the mountain of Croaghmoyle, behind us springs Mount Eagle, while to the northward towers Nephin, one of the most formidable of Irish mountains. From Nephin you may stretch your gaze over the waters of Lough Conn, and see before you in the far distance Killala Bay, where the French landed in 1798.

We make our way to one of the few dwellings on the shores of Beltra. The lad we find here assures us with true Irish readiness that he has the best boat on the lough, and so we outspan, and put up the pony. An inspection of the boat, which has apparently been lying in the sun for weeks, makes us somewhat less certain of our prospects. But the eager boy repeats his warranty; we shove the craft into the water, and bestow ourselves and our fishing gear. Alas! we are not fairly afloat before we see from half a dozen seams the water come pouring in. Desperate bailing enables one of us to keep the craft afloat, while the other essays a few casts; but it is evident that our voyage is doomed, and with what haste we can muster we push across the lake for another cabin, where the right boat—it is quite evident we have chanced upon the wrong one—is to be found. During this hurried excursion we have taken three decent brown trout.

Having changed boats and dismissed our late rower—now too downcast to say even a parting word for his once incomparable craft—with the solace of a badly

earned shilling, we get upon the water again under much more favourable auspices. The sun is a trifle too bright, perhaps, but there is a fair breeze from the west, and a white cloud or two sail boldly across the blue sky every now and again, chequering the lake with cool shadows. The sea-trout on Beltra have, however, been rising none too well of late, and we are by no means sanguine. Our boatman manifestly understands his business, and, moving steadily round the lough, we get to work, the soft breeze materially assisting our casting operations. Three or four brown trout, the biggest of them over half a pound in weight, are hooked and landed, and then comes that delightful, boiling rise, which can never be mistaken, of a strong sea-trout—white trout, as they call them in Ireland. The rise is a good one, and the fish is firmly hooked; and now comes a desperate little battle betwixt fish and angler. There is no better fighter in the world than this pluckiest of the *Salmonidæ*. Three desperate leaps out of the water, displaying the sea-trout's clean shape and silvery sides—critical moments these—and then the fish bores away frantically, demanding and receiving six or eight yards of line. But the battle is to the strong, and in five minutes the white trout is conquered and brought alongside the boat. One quick sweep of the landing-net, and the fish, a beauty of just upon two pounds, lies before us.

Having administered the quietus and duly admired the fair proportions of the capture, we get to work again. Another brown trout or two, and then follow in pretty rapid succession the bold, pulse-quickening rises of four sea-trout, three of which, varying in weight from three-quarters of a pound to one pound and three-quarters, are after some minutes of delightful excitement brought to bag. Then some few more mixed

rises, a handsome brown trout of a pound and a quarter, and after that a halt for luncheon. A water-bailiff has been halloaing to us with great pertinacity for the last twenty minutes, and now putting ashore for a brief space, we are able to lull his suspicions and produce our licences. Poachers of high as well as of low degree are pretty numerous in Ireland, and although rivers and lakes are better protected than they used to be, a good deal of French leave is still taken in these remote places. For sea-trout, as well as for salmon, a £1 fishing licence is required, and occasionally asked for, where keepers do their duty.

It is curious, by the way, how little is known of the habits of the sea-trout. Here in the west of Ireland peasants and water-bailiffs seem to be even less able to enlighten one than their fellows of Scotland or even Norway. When and where do the heavier examples of these fish spawn? Very few anglers, even among those who understand salmon and their ways pretty thoroughly, are able to tell you. In various rivers a large proportion of sea-trout seem to return to the salt water without spawning at all. Again, many of the heavier fish seem to hang about the coast and estuaries. Do these ever ascend a river with their fellows? They love apparently to drift up and down with the tide, to just taste the fresh water coming down from the rivers and move on. The smaller sea-trout do, of course, ascend the upper reaches and spawn; the heavy fish, it would seem, much more rarely. Male fish, too, among heavy sea-trout, seem far scarcer than among salmon. One thing our Mayo friends are able to bear witness to—a fact well known, of course, to most anglers among the *Salmonidæ*—and that is, that white trout, unlike their big cousins the salmon, do feed freely in fresh water. Of that there can be no manner of doubt. Upon

this very morning the biggest sea-trout killed disgorged the remains of several worms upon which it had manifestly been feeding greedily. You may also find them at times stuffed with other food: in salt water, for instance, they are very partial to sand eels. It is now, of course, pretty well established that the lordly salmon seldom, if ever, feeds in fresh water; the sea-trout is, on the contrary, a hearty gourmand in fresh water or salt, and after a spate you will occasionally find him absolutely gorged with worms.

Brown trout, plucky as they are, vary greatly in fighting energy. Of course soil, water, and feeding have much to do with this. There are three well-remembered lakes in Norway, all lying within half a mile of one another, and all holding good fish. In the first and second lakes, set amid thick pine forests, the trout were dark, heavy, and strong, but a trifle sluggish. In the third tarn, which lay among rockier and more open surroundings, and was much less engirt with timber, the fish were lighter in colour and immensely more energetic in character. They were, in fact, perfect furies, the like of which I never encountered before or since. A brown trout of half a pound taken in this upland water gave as much sport as a sea trout of a pound and a half, which is, of course, saying a good deal. In this same Norsk lake char abounded; these deep-water fish were, however, seldom taken, and then only in the hottest weather.

Towards six o'clock, with a respectable creel of brown trout, nobly illumined by nine or ten silvery sea-trout, we run ashore, inspan our pony cart, settle our trifling account with the boat-lad, and, loth though we are to leave this fair scene, drive homewards. As we cross the solemn moorland, now and again is to be seen against the glowing evening sky, plodding homewards,

a patient ass, its two deep wicker creels, or panniers, laden to an impossible height with turf sods, behind which is usually perched a ragged, barefooted boy or girl. The turf sods, dug out of the wild bogland with so much toil, represent, of course, winter firing and winter comfort in the humble Mayo cabin. These wayfarers and a bird or two, a heron, or, as an Irishman would call him, a "crane," cleaving his majestic flight against the yellow sky, or a skein of duck, or a sandpiper, are the only occupants of the quiet waste. Nearing home, we cast a final glance backward towards the lone, majestic mountains, amid which our lake is set. Beautiful Beltra, ever fair to the eye and memory, even among the romantic scenery of wild Mayo, how pleasant are the days passed amid your peerless solitudes and in pursuit of your excellent sporting fish!

CHAPTER XIII

QUAIL

Increasing scarcity in Britain—Irish bags—Quail in 1899 and 1893—Reasons for decrease—Netting in South Europe—The "catch" at Capri—Quail pipes—April migration—Legislation by French Government—London importation—Nesting habits—Quail fighting—Range of the bird—Bustard-quail—Various bags—Old English sport—Quail in the Bible—Notes on migratory instinct—Zulu and Boer legends.

IT seems certain that the quail does not, except in rare seasons, now visit these islands in its former plenty. Even in Ireland, where these charming little game-birds have been more abundant during the nineteenth century than in England, their numbers seem to have been steadily decreasing. Thirty or forty years ago, and even later, it was not uncommon in the sister island to make bags of from four to five brace of quail in a day in certain localities. Now, even in Ireland, the presence of a brace of these birds in the game bag is a rare event. In England more quails seem to have been heard of during the years 1899 and 1893 than for many seasons past. These were exceptionally dry years, and there can be little doubt that a droughty and prolonged summer is more favourable to the presence of quails in this country than any other. It would almost seem, indeed, that these birds were able to foretell a dry season and to extend their migration accordingly. It is probable also that in dry late summers quails delay their southern migration, and are

more often found by gunners in September. In Devonshire, Sussex, Cardiganshire, Yorkshire, and other English counties quails were shot during the season of 1899. A brace were shot in Cardiganshire on September 22nd in a locality where they had neither been seen nor heard of for thirty years. In the burning summer of 1893 a remarkable number of quails arrived and bred in this country. The usual period of the return migration is during the month of August, but in that year they were seen or shot in September in a large number of English counties. They remained, too, much later than usual, and were heard of in the month of November. Occasionally, however, as with landrail, a few stray quails, as the result of a late hatching, or from some temporary disablement, stay with us through the winter and brave the rigours of our harsh climate—to them no doubt hateful—as best they can. In January, 1806, Lord Fitzharris, when shooting in Ireland near the sea coast, flushed and shot three quails—a male, female, and young bird—which were all fat and in good condition.

There are several reasons to account for the scarcity of quails in Britain at the present time. One is, of course, the probability that high farming and drainage have gradually tended to make this country less inviting than of old. Quails like plenty of shelter: and bare stubbles, a lack of coarse grass and other rough covert, with the disappearance of certain kinds of food, have probably tended to drive these birds to other and less highly cultivated countries. An Irish sportsman has described the favourite lying ground for a quail as being in "dirty stubble, the rough edge of a bog, or the 'turning rig' of a potato field where weeds have been allowed to grow." But the main reason for the present scarcity lies probably in the fact

that the vast spring migrations from North Africa and Asia through Southern Europe are steadily diminishing. For ages quails have been captured by the various European peoples bordering upon the Mediterranean in numbers that are perfectly astonishing. The island of Capri, especially, has been renowned for a thousand years and more for the prodigious flights of quails netted there, and the wealth of the island is considerably augmented by the sale of captured birds. The quails begin to arrive in April, and continue to pass northward until the middle of May. The season lasts for about three weeks, and during that period in a good migration about 150,000 quails were, sixty or eighty years ago, taken at Capri alone. The birds are taken almost entirely by means of nets. At the present day a fair catch of quails in Capri during the April migration is estimated at about 30,000 to 40,000 birds. It is at once apparent that the falling off from 150,000 birds, at which the spring captures within one small area were computed some seventy years ago, is a very serious one, and partially accounts for the diminished numbers observed of late years in Britain. This system of netting takes place all along the Mediterranean: it has no doubt increased with the general increase in population, and the decrease in the number of quails captured, observable in Capri, extends to most other places where these birds are taken. Even such prolific creatures as quails can scarcely be expected for ever to contend successfully against this annual drain upon their legions. Yet they exhibit astonishing powers of recuperation, and occasionally reappear in their ancient haunts in marvellous abundance.

During the April migration the birds arrive in the South of Europe in but poor condition. They are mostly captured alive, for the reason that a live quail is

a far more valuable asset than a dead one. From the South of Europe they are despatched alive north, east, and west to the various markets that await them. Those that escape the nets scatter over the face of Europe and proceed to mate, nest, and rear their young. In the autumn migration, after a steady course of feeding in their European abiding-places, they are fat and in high condition. A naturally fattened autumn bird is far more delicious than a quail that has been stuffed at a poulterer's in the low, unwholesome modern cages with which we are familiar. It is to be noted that in Capri during the year 1899 quails were more plentiful than for many seasons past. That this increase in the migration is likely to be maintained is more than doubtful. The decrease in the number of quails annually captured in Europe has not escaped notice. The French Government have now prohibited the sale, importation, and transport of live quails in and through their territory, and it would be well if other European countries, our own included, could be induced to follow this excellent example. Many years ago it was computed by the naturalist Yarrell, after due inquiry, that 3,000 dozen of quails were purchased from foreign dealers by the London poulterers in a single season. It would be interesting to know how many quails are annually disposed of in London now. Probably the 36,000 of Yarrell's time would be easily passed.

The quail makes her nest very much as does the partridge, and lays six or seven eggs. The young develop early the fighting propensity for which these birds are famous. The sharp note of the male bird is of three syllables, and in some parts of Ireland the local name for quail, "wet my lip," is manifestly adapted from the bird's well-known call. From their pugnacious and aggressive disposition, quails have been

used as fighting birds—much as gamecocks were once used in England—in many countries and for long ages. The Greeks and Romans fought mains with them, and there is a story that the Emperor Augustus once punished a prefect of Egypt with death for having destroyed and served at a banquet a famous fighting quail. The Chinese, to this day, match quails one against another, as also do the Italians in some parts of their country.

The common quail has an immense migratory range. During summer it is to be found scattered over the vast regions of North Europe and much of Northern Asia. Near Britain it has been observed as far north as the Faröe Isles. Before autumn it wings its flight again far south and east into warmer quarters, its migration extending to India—where, in the north-west, it is found in very large numbers—and even as far south as the Cape Colony, where, in certain seasons, it is extraordinarily plentiful. Besides the true or common quail (*Coturnix communis*) two other species are found in South Africa—the Cape Quail (*C. Capensis*) and the Harlequin Quail (*C. Delegorguei*); while in India, China, and Japan yet other species are found. New Zealand had formerly a quail of its own (*C. Novæ Zealandiæ*), which, forty or fifty years ago, was shot by the colonists in large numbers. This bird, it is to be feared, has been persecuted out of existence. Small relations of the true quail, known as swamp and painted quails, are found in various parts of the world. The bustard-quails, the tiniest game-birds in existence, sometimes known as hemipodes, but commonly referred to by sportsmen as button-quails, are found also in Africa, various parts of Asia, the Malay Archipelago, and Australia. The quail itself is very much like a partridge in miniature. But the still more diminutive

bustard-quail is an absurd likeness in little of its big cousin the partridge. A very amusing account is given by Mr. Hume of the female bustard-quails of India and China, which are accustomed to fight fierce duels with one another "to preserve the chastity of their husbands, these latter sitting meekly in the nursery and looking after the youngsters."

To sportsmen the quail is, of course, well known. In countries where it is abundant it affords excellent shooting, and very large bags are often made over dogs. In Spain, for example, at the present time fifty couple can be secured in a single day by an expert gunner. In North-West India similar bags are made in good seasons, while in Cape Colony, during a good quail season—which is reckoned by the Dutch farmers as about one in seven—first-rate and very delightful shooting is also obtainable. In Australia sport with the quail of that country (*Coturnix pectoralis*) is often very good. In 1902 a party of three sportsmen in Victoria bagged eighty brace of these birds in two half-days of April shooting.

There is to be found no sort of reference to this game-bird in the Badminton volumes on shooting, from which it is to be gathered that its elimination as a British sporting bird is almost complete. Yet old sporting works evidently regarded the quail as a common English game-bird, and have very precise instructions concerning the various methods of pursuing it. Thus the *Gentleman's Recreation*, published in the reign of Charles II., not only gives plain directions how to take these birds with call-pipe, net, and liming, by stalking-horse, or by the setting dog, but sets forth at length a curious system of netting with the "Low Bell" and links or other lights, by which "good store of partridge, rails, larks, quails," were to be taken. In

Britain, two hundred years ago, most country gentlemen possessed a quail pipe—such as is in use even now in South Europe—for the purpose of decoying these birds.

No naturalist can deny the truth, as well as the beauty, of various passages from the Bible. The references to quails are singularly descriptive, and prove that the Israelites were well acquainted with the migrations of these birds. In the sixteenth chapter of Exodus they are thus referred to: "And it came to pass that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp." In the eleventh chapter of Numbers the migration is thus finely described: "And there went forth a wind from the Lord, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits high. And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp." The reference to quails lying as thick as two cubits high during this great flight may be put down to Eastern exaggeration. But the children of Israel may well have seen, and evidently did see, some vast migrations of quails during their long wanderings.

I never quite realised how overpoweringly strong is the migratory instinct until I saw in South Africa some caged quails at the period of their return migration. At this time, after night had fallen, these birds would repeatedly fly up against the bars of their cage in the attempt to escape, and this although they had been perfectly quiet all day and were fairly tame. The migratory passages of quails are, I think, beyond doubt, made chiefly at night, and there was no question that these caged birds were more anxious to make their flights on

moonlight nights than any others. This at least was my impression, which is strengthened by a note of the late Mr. E. L. Layard, a very careful observer. He says in his *Birds of South Africa:* "At this season, though perfectly quiescent during the day, my birds fly up and dash themselves against the bars at all hours of the night, particularly during moonlight. This could not have been from terror, as they were quite tame at the time, feeding from my hand and scratching on my palm to obtain some desired seed that their little quick eyes discriminated in the mass thus offered them."

The Zulus of Natal have the curious belief that quails turn into toads after their arrival in that country. The reason for this belief, it has been suggested — and I think rightly—is that these birds make their return migration at the time when the heaviest of the rains are about, at which season toads and frogs appear plentifully and quails disappear. In Natal quails appear early in September; in Cape Colony usually towards the end of August, although in some seasons they appear near Cape Town as early as the middle of August. Their stay is a brief one, and they usually make their return journey by the beginning of December. If the British gunner can no longer obtain decent quail-shooting in his own islands, he can certainly get it in South Africa. In good seasons sport with these beautiful little game-birds is first-rate, and bags of thirty and forty brace to a single gun are made without difficulty. The Boers assert that every seventh season is a fat "quail year." That, of course, is an absurdity; it is, however, possible that the average of heavy quail migrations in South Africa may be about one year in seven.

CHAPTER XIV

BUSTARDS

Great bustard—Former plenty in Britain—A notable bag—Distribution of this bird—Curious sporting method in Spain—Weight of great bustard—Former prices—Little bustard—Curious display during courting season—The paauw—Singular encounter—Captures in Wiltshire—Failure of essays in domestication—Lord Walsingham's attempts at reintroduction—Causes of failure—The murderous gunner—Rarity in Ireland—Recent occurrences—Bustards of the world—In South Africa—The paauw and its habits.

THE great bustard, which, up to the beginning of the last century, was a familiar English game-bird, has become long since extinct in Britain, and the occurrences of the few visitors that now reach us are extremely rare. In the days when these birds bred in this country they seem to have afforded plenty of sport to our ancestors. The younger birds were frequently coursed with swift greyhounds, and upon the great wolds and open heaths, such as bustards love to frequent, the chase seems to have been a very exciting one. As the open country became enclosed and cultivated, and as improved firearms came into use, the decline of the great bustard set in. That decline has steadily advanced until Great Britain now knows the indigenous bustard no more, while the rare stragglers that reach our shores are ruthlessly slain within a few days of their arrival.

Yet, up to the year 1810, and even later, these noble birds must have still been fairly common. It is certain that up till that time they were occasionally shot by the

keepers and farmers of the Yorkshire wolds by means of that old-fashioned method, the trained stalking-horse, the stalker himself wearing a coat made of horse hide to correspond as nearly as possible with the colour of the animal behind which he sheltered. Some very interesting letters published by Mr. J. E. Harting, in an article in the *Field* of June 3rd, 1897, afforded remarkable details of bustard-shooting in those days. In the year 1808, by means of this device, eleven bustards fell at a single shot to one Agars, a woldkeeper of that period. An enormous bag, truly! These great bustards of England seem to have been far more confiding in their habits than their near congener, the paauw, or great bustard of South Africa, which is, as the writer can testify, one of the most wary of all sporting fowl. It is probable, however, that English sportsmen were in the habit of attracting a great number of the birds to one spot by means of some favourite food, and then delivering a terrific discharge from one or more guns of heavy calibre. There is a record of a Norfolk keeper at the beginning of last century who arranged a battery of three or four heavy duck guns, covering a spot at which bustards had been accustomed to feed. Seven great bustards are known to have fallen to one of these murderous volleys. By such means, by constant persecution in those localities over which it ranged, and by the natural increase of population and of tillage, the great bustard has become extirpated in these islands. But, although now of the rarest occurrence in its ancient English haunts, this splendid game-bird is to be found plentifully in Spain, the Danubian Provinces, and in parts of Asia and North Africa. In Spain excellent sport is got with these birds by driving, while some numbers are shot over pointers in standing crops, to which towards harvest-time they resort. In Andalusia

a winter day's driving with these bustards is a favourite sport, in which good shooting, a knowledge of the habits of the game, and much tactical skill in placing the guns and manœuvring the birds, all come into play. The Spaniards have a somewhat curious plan—mentioned by Colonel Irby—of shooting bustards at night by means of a stalking-horse, a lantern, and a bell—a truly strange combination. The gunner walks stealthily behind the horse, while his companion rings the bell and shows the lantern. It is to be supposed that the birds are in some way attracted or stupefied by this extraordinary proceeding ; at all events, three or four at a shot are sometimes secured in this way.

The male of the great bustard weighs as much as from 25 lbs. to 35 lbs., the hen bird seldom more than 12 lbs. to 14 lbs. In reasonably good condition these magnificent birds are delicious eating—fat, tender, and of most excellent flavour. That our ancestors set much store by these bustards, even when they were plentiful in this country, is proved by the price they paid for them. In 1760, while wild ducks fetched no more than 6*d.* apiece, hares 6*d.*, partridges 3*d.*, and wild geese 1*s.*, bustards commanded 2*s.*, and pheasants, then scarce birds, 1*s.* 6*d.* In 1833, by which time these birds were becoming very rare—the last indigenous Norfolk bustard was shot in 1838—the price had gone up immensely and the bustard was quoted at from one to three guineas.

The little bustard, found largely in Spain and North Africa, is a mere straggling visitant to these islands, and would never seem to have been indigenous or familiar. Migrating specimens of these birds are, however, still occasionally recorded—and, most usually, incontinently shot—during autumn and winter in Great Britain.

One of the most curious habits of the great bustard is

its absurd carriage and behaviour during the breeding season. In order to render itself attractive to the hen bird it goes through a most complicated process of plumage manipulation. Quivering its wings and depressing the quill feathers, it proceeds to erect its tail and turn it over flat upon its back, thus exposing the white under-feathering in a kind of ruff. Other parts of the plumage are displayed or ruffled out, showing yet more of the white feathering. The head is meanwhile dropped low between the shoulders, the whiskers stand up stiffly, and the throat and forepart of the body are much dilated. Thus disguised—or, as the bird no doubt believes, glorified—the great bustard displays himself solemnly, with occasional jerky leaps, before the hen bird upon which he has set his affections. Much the same kind of process is gone through by the paauw, the gigantic bustard of South Africa, and there is probably little doubt that the early Dutch Boers first bestowed upon that bird its now familiar colonial name —paauw, or peacock—from some fancied resemblance, during this courting period, to the well-known display of the peacock.

Bishop Stanley, of Norwich, father of the late Dean Stanley, in his *History of Birds*, published in the first half of the last century, among other examples of the boldness of birds under certain conditions, gives a curious instance of an attack by a bustard on a human being. "The case of the bustard," he says, "occurred some years ago on Tilshead Downs, in Wiltshire, in the month of June, to a man who was going along the road on horseback, about four o'clock in the morning. His attention was first turned to a large bird flying above his head, which proved to be a bustard, though till then he had scarcely heard of such a bird. He had not proceeded far before it alighted on the ground,

From a photograph by Major H. Moore.

GREAT BUSTARD.

PLATE X.

immediately in front of the horse, which it soon showed signs of attacking, and in a few seconds began the onset. The rider dismounted with all speed, and, getting hold of the bustard, endeavoured to secure it, in which, after a long and severe struggle, he succeeded, and carried it to the house of the person to whom he was going, where it was confined. During the first week it was not known to eat anything; but finally it became very tame, and would take food from the hands of those accustomed to feed it, though it still continued shy in the presence of strangers. From the time of its capture in June, till August, when it was sold to a nobleman for twenty-one guineas, it was never seen to drink; indeed, after the first three weeks, water was never given to it." If this account is reliable—and Bishop Stanley was usually careful of his facts—the attack of this bustard may possibly be attributable to its having a nesting mate somewhere in the vicinity, or to its being a hen bird with young somewhere near. At that period bustards still bred in England. It is worthy of remark that Tilshead, where this *rencontre* happened, was in former days a very noted resort of these splendid birds. Colonel Montagu wrote in 1802 that young birds were frequently taken by shepherds' dogs in the neighbourhood before they were capable of flight, and bustard eggs were eagerly sought after for the purpose of hatching under hens. Half a guinea was no unusual price for an egg, and ten or twelve guineas were paid for a pair of young birds not full grown. Montagu remarks that the consequences of this practice, which seems to have been largely adopted in more than one instance, would be the total extinction of these birds in a few years' time. He was, needless to say, a true prophet. It would seem that these young bustards were treated as domesticated poultry and kept

for table purposes. Between 1802 and 1808 the same practice was resorted to by Mr. George Hardy, House Surgeon to the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital, the eggs being collected from different parts of Norfolk.

It is somewhat singular that, notwithstanding these and other efforts, no person has yet succeeded in perpetuating the race of great bustards as domesticated birds. The turkey and the guinea fowl, one may say even the pheasant, are instances of perfect success in this enterprise during the last two hundred years. Why has the bustard not been thus successfully tamed? It is difficult to say. Some years ago the Acclimatisation Society of Paris, says Mr. Harting, offered prizes for the successful domestication of the great bustard, "one of the conditions being that the birds should be proved to have laid and hatched eggs in confinement." Attempts were made, and incubation was accomplished, but the experiment, as with those in this country, seems to have ended in failure.

Some three or four years back Lord Walsingham attempted, at very considerable expense, to reintroduce the wild bustard into this country again. No less than seventeen great bustards were imported and turned down in the eastern counties. In 1901, at the prosecution of a neighbouring gamekeeper for shooting two of these birds, the keeper of Lord Iveagh, on whose estate the bustards were enlarged, stated that only seven of the seventeen were then surviving. Every effort had been made to protect them, printed notices had been distributed, and the aid of local papers enlisted. Unfortunately, however, the birds, as soon as the wings, which had in the first instance been clipped, grew again, took long flights over the surrounding country—in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Cambridgeshire—and it was found a matter of impossibility to protect

them. The gamekeeper, who had thus wantonly destroyed two birds, which he must have known from their appearance were certainly rare and probably sporting birds, was fined the full penalty of £1 and costs in each instance for killing game out of season. Considering the notices which had been distributed and the common report of the countryside, it is difficult to conceive that the man did not perfectly well know that these bustards, the larger of which he shot standing in a field of peas, were of a protected species. By this time, I believe, this interesting experiment has ended in failure. The bustards have not bred, and the remnant—if any now remain—must, I am afraid, be a very small one. England is, in fact, at the present day too densely populated and too full of irresponsible and unthinking gunners, who shoot at every rare bird they see, to make it possible to conduct successfully so nice and so difficult an operation as the reintroduction of this magnificent game-bird. It is a thousand pities.

It is somewhat remarkable that although bustards were once familiar enough objects on the wilder and more open of our English plains, heaths, downs, and uplands, they have never been included among the birds of Ireland. Smith, it is true, in his *Birds of Cork,* published in 1750, does make mention of this species, but his assertion has, for what naturalists have considered good and sufficient reasons, hitherto been disregarded. However, in the year 1902 there happened an event which seems to show that Mr. Smith may, after all, have been wronged. In December of that year two large birds were seen frequenting some fields near Thurles, county Tipperary, one of which was winged and secured by a farmer's son. This proved to be a female of the great bustard in fine plumage. Although thus rare in the sister island, the great bustard, in the

purely feral state, still travels occasionally across the seas to revisit the ancient haunts of its forefathers in England. Every few years we have notices of a wild bustard, usually accompanied by the familiar corollary that the grand bird has been shot. In 1890 one or two were reported; in 1891 bustards were seen in Sussex, Hants, Wilts, and Norfolk. A few others have occurred since, one of the last reported being one shot near Market Lavington, Wiltshire, in 1897. It is worthy of note that these stragglers seem usually to visit the counties in which their species was once familiar.

In various parts of the world some thirty species of bustard are to be found, of which more than twenty belong to the continent of Africa. Five are almost purely Asiatic, including the Bengal and Lesser Florican and Macqueen's bustard, all of which are Indian; while two, the great and little bustard, are found alike in Europe, North Africa, Central Asia, and Persia. Not a single bustard is to be found in America, while Australia can boast of but one example, the *Otis Australis*, a fine bird familiar to colonial sportsmen as the "wild turkey."

In Southern Africa the bustard in various forms is everywhere well known and appreciated as a sporting bird, and, as a general rule, it may be said that the average gunner in search of feathered game seldom, if ever, fails to include in his mixed and interesting day's bag some few examples of one or other of the ten species to be found south of the Zambesi.

On the open plains he will seldom be long out of hearing and sight of the noisy and often troublesome black koorhaan, or, if north of the Orange, of its near cousin, the white-quilled black koorhaan. Koorhaan, by the way, the name by which all the smaller bustards are known to the English and Dutch colonists, seems

to be merely a corruption of the Dutch name, knorhaan, or scolding cock—a very fitting description—bestowed by the old-time Boer settlers upon the harsh-throated black bustard on making their first acquaintance with that handsome yet most annoying bird. Two of the most beautiful of the lesser Cape bustards are the Vaal and the blue koorhaans, birds of splendid form and colouring, good equally for sport or for the table. Another very beautiful bustard is the bush koorhaan, a denizen of bush and forest country, with its notable pinkish crest, its intense black underplumage, and its handsomely speckled black and rufous back. This bird gets up most silently before the gunner, wavers through the trees with a flight not unlike that of a woodcock, and affords not only pretty shooting, but excellent eating. Two very fine South African bustards are Ludwig's and the Stanley bustards, splendid game-birds, standing in size intermediate between the so-called koorhaans and the giant paauw.

The paauw itself may well be termed the king of all the bustards. It attains a length of more than four feet, a wing-spread of eight feet four inches, and a weight of as much as fifty pounds. The weight depends, of course, greatly upon the bird's feeding. Average well-fed specimens will scale from twenty-five to thirty-five pounds. But at certain seasons this magnificent bird feeds greedily upon the gum exuding from the thorny acacia, and puts on flesh and fat in a quite amazing manner. This habit is so well known that the Boers usually call the bird "Gom (or gum) paauw." In big locust years, too, the paauw gains flesh with great rapidity. At such seasons well-fed male specimens will attain enormous bulk and fatness, and are to be found ranging between thirty-five and forty

pounds—many colonists say even as much as fifty or sixty pounds—in weight. A fat paauw is sometimes so bursting with good living that, when shot in mid-air, he breaks up on hitting the hard, sun-baked earth, very much as would a jelly. The flesh of this splendid game-bird is delicious eating, and the paauw is one of the greatest luxuries of the hunter's camp fire or the colonist's table. Who that has seen two or three of these noble birds pacing with dignified port quietly hither and thither in the veldt, usually not far from a belt of acacia bush or the thorn jungle of a river-course, can ever forget the sight? The paauw is, however, a difficult bird to stalk, and has many ways of circumventing his pursuers. One of these is a trick of squatting and rendering itself invisible even to the keenest and most observant eye. A squatting paauw has a truly marvellous knack of vanishing from the face of the veldt, how and whither one never quite knows. The flight of these great birds is very majestic; the strong and apparently slow wing-beats are very deceptive, and the bird cleaves its way through the clear air in reality far faster than one might suppose. Many a good paauw falls to the rifle bullet, and the rejoicings in camp when the great bird is brought in are, as may be imagined, loud and sincere.

CHAPTER XV

FOX-HUNTING AND ITS FUTURE

Difficulties and dangers—Number of packs hunting—Some comparisons—Gentlemen huntsmen—Beckford's definition—Some lady huntsmen and masters—Professionals—The chase in Britain—Some English kings—Modern fox-hunting—Jacobite sportsmen—Somervile—Warde, Meynell, and Corbett—Warwickshire country—Subscriptions—Private packs—The hey-day of hunting—Prosperity of farmers—A critical period—Three great difficulties—Overcrowding and its evils—"Capping"—Lady riders—Pheasant-preserving—Probable duration of fox-hunting.

IN spite of the ever-increasing difficulties and dangers with which English hunting has been in its later days environed, the sport during the last season seems to have been more keenly pursued than at any former period. For the season of 1903–4 no less than 204 packs of foxhounds were put into the field in Great Britain and Ireland, an advance of 4 upon those of the previous season, and of no less than 22 upon the number of packs hunting in 1895–6; of these, 168 packs hailed from England and Wales, 10 from Scotland, and 26 from Ireland. In 1895–6 the total number of packs of all kinds hunting in these islands was 389. At the beginning of the last season (1903–4) no less than 427 packs—foxhounds, staghounds, harriers, beagles, and basset-hounds—opened the campaign. Harriers and foot-beagles seem to be increasing rapidly in favour. In the palmy days of fox-hunting the chase of the hare had somewhat fallen into disfavour; but the tide is now setting strongly the other way, and during the

past season no less than 138 packs of harriers, together with 60 odd packs of beagles and basset-hounds, were to be found hunting hare in various parts of the British Islands. Bassets are a quite modern introduction, and although hunting any sort of quarry with these long-bodied, short-legged, and somewhat bizarre-looking little hounds is a slow and laborious form of sport, three packs were to be found following hare in different parts of the country. Basset and beagle packs are, of course, followed on foot.

Turning to staghounds, 20 packs were last year furnished by England, as against 4 by Ireland. Scotland supports no staghounds, the pursuit of its numerous wild red deer being reserved solely for the rifle-shot. Of these 24 packs of staghounds hunting last season in England and Ireland, 4 were devoted to the chase of the wild stag. These were the well-known Devon and Somerset hounds, which hunt the wild red deer of Exmoor, Sir John Amory's, the Quantock, and the Barnstaple; the three last-named packs having been newly formed since 1895 for the purpose of hunting those outlying wild deer which now begin to overflow beyond the bounds of Exmoor proper. The New Forest is the only other country where the semblance of wild deer hunting—principally with fallow deer—is still maintained. Nineteen packs of staghounds pursue the carted deer. This is a form of sport which, although it affords a good gallop for those who care to take part in it, can scarcely be designated as hunting proper. The chase of some truly wild and unconfined quarry ought certainly to be implied by the word hunting; and the pursuit of a semi-domesticated deer, vanned to the meet and uncarted for the purpose of pursuit, must be classed as a manufactured pastime. This form of sport, from the accidents which now and

again occur to the deer during the progress of the chase, seems to arouse more enemies than any other pastime—excepting, perhaps, pigeon-shooting; and it is difficult to see why its votaries should not be just as well content with a rousing run with draghounds as with the chase of a tame deer, to which, without any intentional cruelty, accidents, involving pain and suffering to the animal pursued, do undoubtedly happen. It speaks well for the vigour and condition of our gentry at the beginning of the twentieth century that so many amateurs are to be found carrying the horn and undertaking not only with willingness, but with the keenest zest and pleasure, the hard and difficult duties of a professional huntsman. Peter Beckford, in his admirable *Thoughts upon Hunting*, has remarked that, in the opinion of a great sportsman, it is as difficult to find a perfect huntsman as a good Prime Minister. And he enumerates these qualities as being necessary in that calling, "a clear head, nice apprehension, undaunted courage, strength of constitution, activity of body, a good ear, and a good voice." He might well have added to these qualifications "an abounding patience." It will not be contended that every amateur huntsman of the present day unites in his person all these attributes. There are the good and indifferent among gentlemen huntsmen, as there are in all other phases of life. But it may be said, as a general rule, that a fair proportion of our amateurs are sound huntsmen, and show excellent sport. A certain number, prominent in this last decade, among whom may be named the Duke of Beaufort, the late Lord Willoughby de Broke, Mr. John Watson—still actively engaged—and that famous amateur, Colonel Anstruther Thomson—a veteran now retired from the active management of hounds—may be cited

as possessing the necessary physical attributes, with a positive genius for the chase of the fox.

Among the 168 English foxhound packs alone, no less than 74 huntsmen were last season found to be amateurs. In Ireland there were 21 amateur huntsmen out of 26 packs. Among harriers the amateur huntsmen are in a considerable majority. Ladies not only follow hounds more vigorously and more numerously with each succeeding year, but are to be found mastering and even hunting packs themselves! Lady Gifford, for example, masters the pack of harriers known by her name in Sussex, and herself carries the horn. In South Wales Mrs. Pryse-Rice hunts her own harriers; Miss Isa McClintock is at the head of the Tynan and Armagh, while in county Carlow Mrs. Brisco whips a pack of hare hounds to her husband, Captain Brisco. One other lady, Mrs. Cheape, is to be found mastering, but not actually hunting, the Bentley harriers. Last season, 1903–4, it was announced that Miss E. Æ. Somerville—joint-author of that mirth-provoking book, *Some Experiences of an Irish R.M.*—was to be master of the Carbery West Foxhounds, county Cork, a pack for which she has for some seasons acted as honorary secretary. It is among the curiosities of sport that three packs of foxhounds at the present day are mastered by clergymen. Of these one is the Coniston, a little Lakeland pack of ten couples, which hunts the rough upland districts of Ambleside, Windermere, Coniston, and Grasmere, under the control of the Rev. E. M. Reynolds. The Rev. E. A. Milne is master of the Catt-is-tock, a pack hunting near Dorchester and Weymouth. The Rev. Sir William Hyde-Parker, who controls the Newmarket and Thurlow, is the other clergyman now mastering a pack of foxhounds.

Professional hunt servants, who form one of the most

reliable, manly, and deserving classes to be found in the various strata of British society, are as active, keen, and hard-working as ever. There are probably more good huntsmen in these islands than ever before, as well as plenty of undeveloped material in good first and second whippers-in. In many families of our professional hunt servants the science and traditions of hunting have been handed down for generations, and the love of the chase seems to be indelibly implanted in the blood. To mention only a few names at hazard, the families of Goodall, Goddard, Boxall, Orvis, and Gosden are examples very well in point. As a body of men, none are more hardy, quick-witted, and courageous than the British professional huntsmen. Here and there a veteran may lag superfluous, but, as a rule, be the country never so big or unyielding, the huntsman is to be found ever close alongside his pack.

The chase in Britain, although threatened at the end of the nineteenth century with terrors hitherto unknown, seems to be endowed with wonderful vitality, which can only be accounted for by the extraordinary passion for hunting implanted so deeply in mankind, and especially in men of British blood. Dio Nicæus has placed it upon record that the ancient inhabitants of these islands were fierce barbarians, who tilled no land, but existed by the fruit of their depredations on their neighbours, or upon the food procured in hunting. Strabo, in his time, sings the praises of the hounds bred in Britain. Oppian, too, bears testimony to the super-excellence of the hounds, hunters, and horses of Britain. Most of our kings, nobles, and gentry have delighted to pursue with horn and hounds the various beasts of chase which at one time or another these islands have afforded them. Edward III. was passionately attached to hunting, and maintained, even

upon his French campaigns, sixty couple of staghounds, and as many of harriers—a very handsome outfit even for a king of England.

Before the Reformation many of the clergy spent a large portion of their time in the chase of the stag, hare, fox, and marten. Their habits—of which hunting, by the way, seems to have been by far the least objectionable—aroused the deep anger of Langland. In *Piers Plowman* is to be found a bitter tirade levelled at the Church dignitary of that period, who is described as "a pricker on a palfrey from manor to manor; an heap of hounds at his ears, as he a lord were." The fox-hunting parson dies hard, but is now gradually dwindling towards extinction. We still have, as I have shown, a few hunting clergymen among us, of whom it may be said with truth, that if they love to hear horn and hound, and to pursue the most wily and resourceful of all beasts of chase, they do not neglect, as did their predecessors of the pre-Reformation period, the cures committed to them. It may be said that all hunting clergy, whether before the Reformation or since, have had before them a shining pattern and example in the saintly and monastic king, Edward the Confessor. The Confessor had not a single secular amusement save that of hunting; but, according to William of Malmesbury, the gentle King took an unbounded delight "to follow a pack of swift hounds in pursuit of game, and to cheer them with his voice."

The Norman invasion had the effect for centuries of making hunting the jealously guarded appanage of the king and the great barons and landed proprietors. The game and forest laws of that period were of almost unexampled savagery, and the commoner people were deterred by terrible penalties from interfering with the various animals hunted by their overlords. But, in

process of time, as freedom was slowly wrested from the king and aristocracy, the yeomen and tenant farmers became enabled to join in the sport of hunting, and to mingle, as they have mingled now for some two hundred and fifty years, with the squires and nobility in a friendly, equal, and most honourable rivalry, which even five and twenty years of bitter depression have not sufficed to quench or endanger.

Fox-hunting in its present form has existed for little more than two hundred and fifty years. The more important of the wild fauna of the country, which for centuries had afforded sport to the great feudal lords, had been steadily vanishing; the wolf had become practically extinct; the wild red deer was becoming scarce; the roe no longer flourished in its former plenty; the best of the land was becoming gradually enclosed. In earlier times the fox seems to have been looked upon as a less important quarry even than the hare, the otter, and the marten. But by the reign of Charles I. his due worth and importance had become recognised, and Reynard of England was beginning to take high rank in the system of venery. By the reign of Queen Anne fox-hunters pure and simple were as well known and recognised in the social system as they are at the present day. In the early part of the eighteenth century these gentry seem to have been mostly Jacobites and high Tories, and the writings of Addison and others refer frequently to them. The English portion of the ill-starred Stuart rising of 1715 was managed, or rather mismanaged, mainly by a few north-country fox-hunting squires, of whom Tom Forster, of Bamborough, and the Earl of Derwentwater were at the head. These honest gentlemen were better sportsmen than politicians and warriors, as history has long since demonstrated. Addison, in an amusing

paper in the *Freeholder*, depicts the unwonted arrival in town of one of these Tory fox-hunters, who had come up "in order to give his testimony for one of the rebels, whom he knew to be a very fair sportsman." I am afraid that Addison's opinion of the fox-hunting squire of that period was not of the highest. But then Addison was diametrically opposed in politics to the Jacobites, and held high office under George I. He is constantly poking fun at the poor gentleman. He represents him, in another number of the *Freeholder*, as complaining that there had been "no good weather since the Revolution." And he makes the same fox-hunter proceed to expatiate on "the fine weather they used to have in Charles the Second's reign." Times have changed indeed since the days of these fine old crusted Tories of the Queen Anne and early Georgian period. A man may now be as strong a supporter of Radical principles as you please and yet be a staunch fox-hunter. One example among many hundreds will suffice. Earl Spencer has always been, to the very last, one of the keenest supporters of Mr. Gladstone's policy. Yet there is no more ardent fox-hunter in England than his lordship; as witness his various masterships of the Pytchley hounds, and his presence in many a good run during the last forty years over the noble grass pastures of Northamptonshire.

Fox-hunting, although during the nineteenth century it had attained so amazing a popularity, and now attracts a crowd of votaries of all sorts and conditions, was, in the first instance, designed only for the enjoyment of the squires and their immediate friends, as well as the parson, the doctor, the yeomen, tenant farmers, and a few others from the neighbouring countryside. In truth, this seems to be the most proper and reasonable way in which hunting should be enjoyed. The

fox-hunting squires of the eighteenth century would have been horror-stricken if they could have foreseen the immense gatherings which in fashionable countries now cover the fields and throng the covertside. Until past the middle of that century those country gentlemen —and they were the vast majority—who cared for field sports kept a few couple of hounds, and hunted when and as it pleased them. Often these hounds were of different breeds, and fox, hare, and otter were pursued in season. Somervile, the author of that excellent poem, *The Chace* (still, perhaps, the best description of hunting in the English language), who died in 1742, at the age of 65, was a typical example of the hunting squire of that period. At his house at Edstone, in Warwickshire, he maintained a few couples of harriers, foxhounds, and otter hounds, with which he pursued the quarry which happened to be in season.

These cheery sportsmen of the eighteenth century met usually at a much earlier hour than at the present time, and spent much longer days in the saddle. The country was then in great part unenclosed, and although there was necessarily a fair share of leaping, there could have been nothing like the amount of fencing now enjoyed by fox-hunters. Long hunting runs at a steady pace were much more often the rule than those fast gallops which at this period of the twentieth century are so much in vogue. Hounds were not then bred for pace as they now are. Sportsmen rose very early in those days:

> "Ere yet the morning peep,
> Or stars retire from the first blush of day,
> With thy far-echoing voice alarm thy pack,
> And rouse thy bold compeers,"

says Somervile in his vivid poem. After a long and enjoyable day's hunting the squire and his friends

whipped off towards afternoon, jogged homewards, and after a hearty dinner, washed down by sound claret —port was a much later introduction—more often than not devoted the whole evening to a bowl or two of punch and much conviviality. Poor Somervile himself seems to have fallen a victim to good cheer and the careless and too hospitable keeping of open house.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century this most pleasant, but somewhat intermittent and informal, style of hunting began to be supplanted by more systematic and organised methods. Large packs of carefully bred hounds, devoted solely to the chase of the fox, were set on foot; districts were marked out and assigned; and a little later hunt clubs came into vogue. Mr. John Warde, Mr. Hugo Meynell, and Mr. John Corbet are famous among the forerunners of the modern style of fox-hunting. In Warwickshire, where for many years past the late Lord Willoughby de Broke provided some of the best sport in England, the first organised pack seems to have been established by Mr. Wrightson, a Yorkshire gentleman, in or about the year 1780. Mr. Wrightson had kennels at Stratford-on-Avon and Swalcliffe, and managed his pack with the aid of a huntsman and two whips, each of whom was provided with four horses. John Warde, sometimes called "the father of English foxhunting," also hunted in Warwickshire before 1791. This great sportsman maintained hounds in various parts of England for close on sixty years. He patronised his own county of Kent, Berks, Oxfordshire, Warwickshire, Northamptonshire — the present Pytchley country—and Hampshire. He died in 1838, at the age of 86.

Mr. John Corbet, of Sundorne Castle, Shropshire, another of the pioneers of hunting, succeeded John Warde in Warwickshire in 1791. He was universally

OLD-TIME FOX-HUNTING—AN EARTH-STOPPER.
(From an old print.)

PLATE XI.

popular throughout the county—he hunted in those days the whole of Warwickshire—and his memory is still kept green in the hearts of the gentry, yeomen, and farmers of that sporting shire. An excellent print of this famous sportsman, mounted on his favourite white horse, cap in hand, cheering on his hounds by the covert-side, is still to be seen in many a Warwickshire home. Mr. Corbet hunted the country with great liberality. He maintained 70 couples of hounds. This is a large number even for modern times. At the present time the largest pack of hounds in England is the Duke of Beaufort's, which numbers 75 couples. The average number of hounds at the present day, for a first-rate pack, ranges between 50 and 55 couples; the late Lord Willoughby de Broke hunted the present Warwickshire country with 52½ couples, which were generally conceded to be the best hounds in modern England. The North Warwickshire, which now hunts another portion of the great district hunted at the beginning of the nineteenth century by Mr. Corbet, maintains 52 couples. The Pytchley and Quorn put into the field respectively 55 couples and 70 couples.

Mr. Corbet took upon his own shoulders the cost of hunting the Warwickshire country. He established a hunt club at Stratford-on-Avon, but demanded no subscription beyond a contribution of £5 apiece from each member towards earth-stopping. The hunt club met once a fortnight for dinner at the White Lion Hotel, Stratford-on-Avon. Its members wore red coats, with gilt buttons and black velvet collars, together with black stockings, breeches, and waistcoats. At these gatherings, after the toast of "the King," that of "the blood of the Trojans" was solemnly drunk. Trojan was a famous old hound of Mr. Corbet's, from whence the Warwickshire pack largely sprang. Mr. Corbet showed wonder-

ful sport in Warwickshire, and some of the runs of that day were of extraordinary length and severity. Slow hunting was, of course, still much in vogue, although the foxhound was being rapidly improved in pace and quality. In 1795 the pack ran for six hours, and it is computed that they must have travelled close on fifty miles of country.

This fine old ancestor of modern hunting gave up the Warwickshire country in 1811, after twenty years of extraordinary success. His generosity, tact, and great courtesy, especially to the farmers, are to this hour a tradition in the county. I have in my young days often talked with old Warwickshire people who could remember in their youth Mr. Corbet and his hounds. The old print of the famous Warwickshire master and his pack, sometimes hung in their dining-rooms, and the memories of Squire Corbet seemed even then very fresh in their minds. That Mr. Corbet maintained his hunt in first-rate style is shown by the fact that at the sale of his hounds and stud two of his hunters realised 250 guineas each—a great price for those days.

The examples of Corbet, Warde, Meynell, and others of the same stamp had a great and rapid effect throughout the country. Packs were properly organised, hunt clubs formed, kennels built; the methods of hunting underwent radical changes. The desire for bolder and quicker runs began to develop with the improvement in hound blood. Small coverts were planted, as it began to be recognised by the new school that hunting in the great woodlands often meant long and tedious days of slow sport, and that from gorse coverts, planted in convenient parts of the country, first-rate runs in the open were most frequently obtained.

A little later, subscriptions, which had hitherto been few and intermittent, came into vogue, and, towards the thirties, hunting in most parts of England had assumed the system and character it now holds. Market Harborough, Melton Mowbray, Leamington, and other centres of hunting became fashionable, and the fields of sportsmen began to assume at the more favourite meets very considerable proportions. Packs of hounds now began to be divided into two classes—those maintained by subscription, and those carried on at the expense of the nobility and a few of the richer squires. During the eighteenth century many of the nobility had been in the habit of maintaining hounds at their own expense. These, although numerically more important than the small, rough packs of which Somervile's primitive establishment was typical, were, compared with the packs introduced by Warde and his co-reformers, very inferior. As the pomp and panoply of the chase became more carefully organised and developed, the kennels of the great landed aristocracy underwent, too, a complete transformation, and their establishments presently became famous throughout Europe for the magnificence of their equipment and the hunting powers of the hounds maintained. The Belvoir, the Duke of Grafton's, the Badminton, Lord Fitzwilliam's, the Goodwood, the Duke of Buccleugh's, the Earl of Eglinton's, Lord Portsmouth's, Lord Leconfield's, and other well-known packs, are among the great establishments of this kind which sportsmen of this generation will at once recall. It is one of the great misfortunes of rural England in these days that, thanks to the depression in agriculture, so many of these famous proprietary packs have had, one by one, to be abandoned by the great families, which, at their own expense, had so long and so generously maintained them.

By the year 1830 fox-hunting in England had reached the high rank and perfection which it has ever since maintained. Meets of the best and most accessible packs began to be frequented by more and more sportsmen, and the cry of overgrown and overriding fields was already being raised by worried masters and irate huntsmen. It is a mistake to suppose that large fields are the product of the last few years alone. This evil is one which has been steadily increasing for the past sixty or seventy years. The writer is old enough to remember, when hunting as a lad in Northamptonshire, some thirty-five years since, during Colonel Anstruther Thomson's mastership of the Pytchley, that the fields of that period were often exceedingly large, requiring all the firmness and tact of that first-rate master and brilliant amateur huntsman to keep in check.

The best days of modern hunting may be said to have reached their zenith between 1840 and 1870. The landed gentry, the yeomen, and the tenant farmers were then alike flourishing. In the earlier part of the last century, and especially during the Napoleonic wars, agriculturists made immense prices for their grain, and saved much money. The sons and successors of that generation were—I speak of the large tenant farmers, men who occupied from 300 to 600 acres of land—with few exceptions, left considerable sums of money to carry on business with. Many of the old school of farmers died worth from £15,000 to £25,000. Such fortunes had usually to be divided among several children, but the generation of large tenant farmers, which flourished between 1840 and 1870, consisted mostly of substantial men, having ample capital and a remunerative business in the land they occupied. It can scarcely be wondered at that the hearty and well-to-do farmers of that golden period enjoyed life, and

saw no harm in indulging in the good things that came to them, especially in the fine old English sport of hunting. They lived well; most of them had, as their fathers had before them, excellent cellars of port wine; and the hospitality of rural Britain was never more open-handed. At this period the farmers, if they lived well, lived within their means. They can scarcely be blamed for not foreseeing the pinching times, the terrible losses that lay before them and their successors between 1875 and the end of the century. Wire fencing and other terrors were undreamed of; the fox-hunter was everywhere welcomed; no man, except the master and hunt servants, grumbled at large fields; everything was done by the tenant farmer to minister to the success and enjoyment of the "sport of kings." The squires and aristocracy for their part flourished exceedingly. They had got their rents up to a record point; the farmers were good and willing payers; thus all parties interested in the land could and did most heartily enjoy the wholesome life of the countryside, and especially the sport of fox-hunting. Here and there, perhaps, were discerned the beginnings of future drawbacks and annoyances. One little rift within the lute was just beginning to appear. Pheasants, one of the chief evils of modern fox-hunting, were already being largely cultivated; and even at this, the best period of English hunting, friction began to arise between the more selfish game preservers and their keepers, and masters of hounds. This drawback of pheasant preservation has, as we all know, by this time attained very menacing proportions; and, with that other modern curse of barbed wire, now threatens, in places, the very existence of our great winter sport.

It is needless to recall the piteous tale of the last

eight-and-twenty years, the decline and fall of the landed interest, and the extraordinary changes which have been wrought in less than a generation. The once well-to-do farmer, his capital long since clean vanished in the soil, his living torn from him by foreign competition and over-production, now worries along hopelessly from hand to mouth, scarcely daring to look the future in the face. Fox-hunting has been sadly relinquished by the bulk of the tenantry of Britain. Keenly though they regret the loss of the pastime, they cannot afford it. From parishes where, thirty or forty years ago, half a dozen farmers rode forth on hunting mornings, often not a single man now turns out. Yet, to his eternal credit be it said, the average British farmer still turns a kindly eye upon a sport now mainly patronised by strangers, still allows his land to be galloped over, still does what he can to preserve foxes and show sport.

But hunting just now is passing through a very critical period. Whether, as all good Englishmen hope, it will emerge triumphantly from the dangers which beset it, and flourish for another hundred years or two, depends mainly upon its followers. Hitherto, the farmer and the squire have given practically everything and received very little—even of thanks—in exchange. Without the land and foxes, hunting would cease instantly. Yet the crowds of strangers who have been in the habit of invading hunting countries for a generation or two past, too often contributing either grudgingly or not at all to the hunt funds, seem to have been under the impression that they were to go on indefinitely—long even after the advent of agricultural depression—enjoying one of the finest sports in the world without contributing more than a mere trifle towards its support. Even men who regularly subscribe to the hunt

funds contribute very inadequately. Rich men, who send a cheque for twenty-five or fifty guineas to the hunt secretary, and a trifle towards the poultry account, think they have behaved handsomely enough. Yet the same men will not grudge hundreds, sometimes even thousands, towards a grouse moor, or a salmon river, or a deer forest, or a yacht, or a motor-car. It is clear that if hunting is to go on, rich men, who must and will hunt, will have to pay a great deal more for their sport than they have done hitherto. Wire fencing, a product of hard times with the farmer, has now reached such proportions that, in some counties, sport is almost completely ruined by its existence. Hunting men now gallop across the land with feelings very different from those of the joyous and careless days of thirty years ago, and fences are often ridden at with something akin to a shudder, lest the hated wire should lie concealed. A few years since the late Mr. Heywood-Lonsdale, then master of the Shropshire hunt, pointed out that hunting would have to be abandoned if the wire evil were not abated. Yet, with few exceptions, the wire trouble is a mere matter of pounds, shillings, and pence. Small farmers, who cannot afford expensive fencing, naturally betake themselves to the cheap, if objectionable, wire. Given sufficient funds, in nearly every county in the kingdom wire can be removed and replaced at the end of each hunting season. The farmers themselves, as a class, would be as pleased as hunting men to see the thing done. In some counties this difficulty is being dealt with in the right way; in others, if richer men wish to hunt much longer, they will assuredly have to pay for the expense of wire removal.

Here and there it is possible that in future some compensation will have to be paid to the poorer farmer for the right to hunt on his land. Hunting rents, at the

rate of 6*d.* to 1*s.* per acre, have already been discussed at one or two meetings of agriculturists. On the face of it, this is not a very outrageous proposition. Sportsmen pay gladly for the right to shoot partridges and other game. A hunting rent of 6*d.*, or even 1*s.* per acre is not ruinous, and many a small farmer would be made well content by £5 or £10 for the winter use of his land, plus compensation for serious damage to crops or fences. Large tracts of land, farmed by gentlemen and even by the large agriculturists, would be no doubt exempt from this tax.

Masters of hounds and farmers are now, very rightly, directing their attention to the thinning of overgrown fields. It is abundantly clear, not only that hunting men will have to be more careful of crops, stock, ewes in the lambing season, and other matters, but that strangers who do not or will not contribute to the cost of hunting will not be tolerated. Already the galloping of irresponsible second horsemen across fields and fences has been prohibited by various masters in the more fashionable countries. That is an excellent example, which will no doubt be followed in many hunts. The stranger difficulty is a serious one to grapple with, but there can be no doubt of its ending. The stranger will have to go, unless he contributes for his day's sport. Various systems have been suggested. Capping is but a clumsy shift at best. The idea of selling tickets, as for fishing, is not a bad one. But one thing is certain, the days of the stranger and pilgrim who declines to pay for his sport are absolutely doomed, and not very long hence he will have rightly vanished from the scenes of his former joys. In fine, it may be predicted that, if hunting is to continue, in fashionable countries every hunt subscriber will have to pay much more for his sport and pleasure. It seems only fair that

the landed gentry, who suffer seriously from the depression, and who usually contribute without fee or reward much of the ground hunted over, should pay less than other subscribers. In unfashionable countries the sport will probably revert more and more to the form of chase in vogue with our ancestors; fields will be small; and only the squires, wealthy residents within the hunt, subscribers, and such of the farmers as can afford it, will appear at the covert-side.

Overcrowding has now attained such proportions in many of the more fashionable countries that desperate remedies have to be exhibited in order to get rid of the evil. I have spoken of capping as but a clumsy deterrent; yet, such as it is, it is now being seriously adopted in the shires. The Warwickshire, Pytchley, North Warwickshire and other hunts now cap, during the season, all strangers and non-subscribers at the rate of £2 per head per diem. The impost has certainly had considerable success in thinning the horde of irresponsible folk who wander from hunt to hunt without paying a shilling for their pleasure. Yet the system has many drawbacks. It is unpleasant to have to dun people for money, while if they refuse to pay there is no real remedy. The master can scarcely be expected to take hounds home and spoil the sport of his subscribers for the sake of inflicting a lesson on such wandering folk as refuse to pay the levy required of them. The collection of money itself has its awkward side. The secretary of a well-known hunt last season became so burdened with his load of shekels that he had to transfer the contents of his bulging pockets to a dog-cart. But if no friendly conveyance is handy, the secretary of a hunt, especially if he should chance to be paid the "cap" fees partially in silver, might conceivably find himself burdened with an additional

dead weight of some pounds avoirdupois—a load which his fretting horse, already fidgeting at the nature of his duties, might well resent. Altogether the capping system has many drawbacks. Still, as a temporary alleviation, it seems likely to be largely adopted in the near future.

The causes which have led to the introduction of a heavy "cap" are at the bottom of most of the inevitable deterioration of hunting manners, which good sportsmen, who really love hunting for hunting's sake, so much deplore. Overcrowded fields lead to jealousy. No man wants to be left behind, and it is a common enough thing now, in what are called the fashionable countries, to witness at the covert-side some extremely unpleasant scenes. The struggle for a good start in a crowded field, when a fox is found, brings out some of the worst features of the selfish sportsman, and men who ought to know better are now to be seen overriding hounds in a way that would have been deemed by our hunting ancestors of a generation or two back absolutely impossible.

It is not an uncommon thing now in well-known hunting countries, when a fox is holloaed away, to see a few couple of hounds appear from covert, then some of the more jealous or more reckless of the field, then more hounds, then the main body of the field, finally a mixed assortment of tail hounds and riders. Such a scramble is not hunting. It is a most disreputable and melancholy spectacle, and the sight of the unfortunate master, flaming with anger, yet powerless against the mere numbers of ill-conditioned offenders, is yet more melancholy. Foxes are mobbed and headed and sport is ruined, by consequence, day by day, and a good run is the exception, and not the rule, in most of the flying countries.

The deterioration of hunting manners is, in fact, one of the worst symptoms of latter-day fox-hunting. If the chief cause of that ugly excrescence, overcrowding, can be removed—even by so cumbersome an expedient as "capping"—that expedient may yet have a career. Already the £2 cap has, as I have said, had a very salutary effect in the Warwickshire and Pytchley hunts.

Among the crowd of over-riders so conspicuous in modern hunting many women are, notoriously, among the worst offenders. The worst examples of hard-riding women seem, in truth, to possess far less even of conscience and of manners than the worst of the over-riding men. That is saying a good deal, yet every person familiar with hunting knows that it is the fact. In one dangerous particular lady riders are far greater sinners than men—that is in the practice of riding far too close to their predecessor at a fence. Several lamentable fatalities during the last few seasons have been caused by this most hateful habit; and the death of a friend of the writer, under most grievous circumstances, was attributable directly to the fact that a hard-riding female rode him down at a jump, where his horse had fallen. Everyone taking a fence is entitled to have fair and reasonable leaping room, so that in the event of a fall he may have a chance for his life. Women—the majority of them—seem to be incapable of recognising this fact, and terrible accidents have occurred, and will probably occur again, in consequence of their misfeasances.

But, in addition to barbed wire and overcrowded fields, one other great danger threatens hunting. The pheasant preserver has long been the unavowed enemy of the fox-hunter. There are, of course, some proprietors, especially among the more ancient landed families, who have been bred to regard fox-hunting as

a sport to be religiously encouraged and not destroyed, in whose coverts pheasants and wild foxes are produced together, and the master of hounds and his pack are received with a genuine and hearty welcome. But the very reverse of this is far too often seen. Men are more and more becoming owners and lessees of great shootings, who not only take little interest in hunting, but do all in their power to crush out and discourage it.[1] This may not be done openly; there are a score of ways, all well understood by a certain class of keeper, by which the wild fox can be exterminated or driven away. Among these enemies of fox-hunting, the man who has become suddenly rich, who has been reared in towns, and cares little for the ancient interests and traditions of the countryside, and especially that of fox-hunting, is too often in evidence. He is too old, too soft, or has too little nerve to acquire the difficult art of riding to hounds; but he can and does acquire a certain amount of skill in shooting. He spends money lavishly in rearing pheasants and providing big "shoots"; his wealth, his magnificent entertainments, his holocausts of game, bring him quickly the friends and the paragraphic notoriety that he desires. In the opinion of this class of person, wild foxes and foxhounds have no business near his coverts, and his keepers take good care that his private ideas are carried out. It is true that this type of pheasant preserver dare not plainly declare himself the bitter enemy of the fox-hunter.

[1] Shooting speculators and syndicates are among the chief offenders in this respect. As a rule they have few interests or friends in the district in which they operate, and are therefore almost absolutely unaffected by the annoyance and dislike of their neighbours. It may be possible, in future, to get rid of some of these foes to fox-hunting, in the richer hunts, by hiring, and re-letting to shooting tenants, who will preserve foxes in reason, the woodlands and coverts from which Reynard has been banished and destroyed. That, of course, means further considerable burdens upon the hunt funds.

Public opinion, of which he has a wholesome dread, would not at present tolerate such an open avowal. But the wild fox knows his woodlands no more, and miserable imported beasts, kept in hand and turned down periodically against the coming of the hounds, are offered in its place. From these imported foxes, confined in some filthy kennel till they are foul with disease, has been spread the fell plague of mange, which nowadays devastates whole districts and threatens even to exterminate wild-bred foxes altogether. In some countries foxes have become so scarce from the ravages of mange that even masters of hounds are compelled to import fresh stock and turn them down. These importations again are, from confinement, often liable to disease, and are very poor substitutes for the aboriginal wild fox of the district.

Some owners of large pheasant coverts have lately become so emboldened as to refuse the entrance of hounds into their woods until after mid-December or even January. This is not an absolutely new development. It has been known in a few instances for fifty or sixty years past. But it is a steadily growing evil, which must have some limit if fox-hunting is to continue. If these and other selfish tactics are persisted in, fox-hunting must and will disappear, as some masters of hounds predict that it will, in certain parts of England.

In the struggle which is going forward between the pheasant preserver and fox-hunter, it may be safely said that public opinion is strongly upon the side of the ancient and far more manly sport of fox-hunting. And in the long run the great fox-hunting interest may be trusted to find a remedy for the evils wrought by overmuch pheasant culture. Combination can do a good deal; and, without advocating the "boycott," a com-

bination of the fox-hunting interest throughout England would be a force which even hardened pheasant preservers would be compelled to listen to. I speak, of course, of the worst and most selfish form of game preserving. As everyone knows, hundreds of good shooting-men are also good fox-hunters and fox preservers.

Upon the whole it may be asserted that, in spite of the dangers I have touched upon, fox-hunting is by no means upon its last legs. It has yet an enduring vitality. Here and there it may be crowded out of existence, but it will probably survive far into the present century, nay, even beyond. Changes and reforms, in the very nature of things, there will have to be. Many of these are already in progress. The fact that more than two hundred packs of hounds were put into the field last season in the United Kingdom indicates that the pastime has still abounding vigour and troops of friends. A fine, manly, and most bracing pastime, fox-hunting, of all our field sports, can least be suffered to die out.

CHAPTER XVI

PRAWNING

Best season for sport—A summer pastime—Good baskets—Cycling an aid to prawning—A thousand-prawn bag—Good catches—Diana of the shore—Costume—Difficulties of the rocks—Various species of prawn—The English crustacean—Modes of fishing—The gin-net and pole—A day's sport—Fishing gear and cost—A long climb—Birling Gap—At work—Adventure with a conger eel—Conger pie—Hot lobster pie—A rare delicacy—The total catch—Homeward.

SO far as the average amateur is concerned, the excellent pastime of prawning begins with mid-May and early June, and ends with the close of September. June and July are, perhaps, the best months, but August is often almost equally as good. By Michaelmas the fishermen will, except in an abnormally mild autumn, such as 1902, think it high time to put away his nets and turn his energies into other channels. Prawning is, in fact, purely a warm weather sport, to be appreciated in its highest perfection when the midsummer sun shines overhead and seas are blue. These delicious crustaceans have a distaste for chilly waters, and prefer to come inshore, and are most numerous when the sun blazes in its fullest strength and the water has become thoroughly warmed. As the cold of autumn returns they betake themselves to deeper water again. The fisherman finds them then steadily becoming less numerous, and, after all, trying to lure the wily prawn, when the sea temperature has gone below 55, when there is a cutting wind blowing,

and one's hands and legs are drenched with salt water, is rather a chilling form of pleasure, conducive to rheumatism and other ills. Prawning is, in truth, essentially a summer pastime, thoroughly enjoyable in those warm, pleasant days when no one minds partial immersion, and a tumble into a pool or gully among the rocks is rather matter for laughter than otherwise.

The pursuit of the lively and voracious prawn has, during the last few years, become quite a fashion upon the south coast. Always in favour among a few enthusiasts who could appreciate a good thing, it has rather suddenly acquired a much more considerable vogue. Prawning parties are now constantly organised, and expeditions of seven or eight miles frequently made in search of this excellent spoil of the sea. Even comparatively raw amateurs can secure quite respectable bags, and a party of six or eight will often return with a catch of 500 or 600 prawns. No one, not even the man who turns up his nose at the humble shrimp, can possibly affect to despise the noble prawn, and a dish of these delicacies, cooked and eaten the same evening, is a luxury fit for Lucullus, well worth the small trouble of catching. The prawn, indeed, brilliant in its scarlet coat, is not only an ornament to the snow-white cloth, but a delicacy to be highly appreciated even by the greatest of gourmets.

The advent of cycling has placed many a distant prawning-ground, once only frequented by the professional fisher, and by him, perhaps, only occasionally, within easy reach. Waggonettes and brakes are chartered, and those who can afford it appear to think a guinea or a guinea and a half in the way of carriage hire by no means ill spent for the pleasure of a day with the prawns, and a delightful picnic into the bargain. To catch prawns you must, of course, be in

the vicinity of rocks. The shores most suitable for the purpose are those in which the tireless sea has worn deep gullies and pools. With every tide legions of these hungry and carnivorous crustaceans come shoreward in search of food, darting hither and thither with astonishing swiftness, searching amid the long, overhanging kelp that clothes the rocks, and watching with keen eye for any prey that may seem good to them. Happily for the prawn fisher, the numbers of these crustaceans seem to be quite inexhaustible. With each returning tide you find them, if the conditions of wind, temperature, and water are favourable, in astonishing profusion, and excellent baskets can be made without difficulty. I know of a party of amateurs who carried away a thousand prawns as the result of fishing for one tide last summer; and, if a person understands his business at all, he may expect to catch to his own basket, on a good tide, from 80 to 150 prawns without great trouble. The amateur has also the satisfaction of knowing that he is not in any way spoiling the occupation of the professional prawner. The shoreline is wide, prawns are marvellously plentiful, and, unlike the deep-water fisheries of the North Sea, the coasts of Britain show not the slightest diminution in the yield of these plentiful and easily captured creatures.

It is refreshing to find ladies taking so keenly to this fascinating form of fishing. The girl of the present day, and for that matter the matron also, without the least invasion of the proprieties, has no scruples in kilting up her skirts, taking off her stockings, and, armed with nets and a hooked pole, betaking herself to the rocks in search of sport. An old short skirt is usually donned for the occasion, while the feet are shod in canvas or bathing shoes. Not only are

many of these Dianas of the shore as keen sportswomen as their classical prototype, but they are equally as bold and adventurous. Good prawning rocks afford by no means easy locomotion; they are covered with slippery weed, and abound in treacherous holes and yawning gullies. Yet I have seen during this last summer or two plenty of girls taking their risks as gaily as their tougher and stronger mankind, and accepting falls, bruises, and occasionally nasty gashes of the legs with really admirable good humour and courage. Nay, more than once have I witnessed a Sussex girl pick herself up from almost complete immersion in a deep rock pool with no more ado than if she had been taking a paddle along the sands in a few inches of water.

There are, as the reader may, or may not, be aware, many kinds of prawn, mostly designated by naturalists under the general *Palæmon*, *Pandalus*, and *Hippolyte*. They are, of course, closely allied to the shrimps, and first cousin of the lobsters and that ilk. They vary very much in size, some of the tropical forms being monsters attaining more than a foot in length. Think of it, British shore-fishers, a prawn of more than twelve inches! The particular crustacean most familiar to English prawners is *Palæmon serratus*, well known by the serrated horn or rostrum projecting from the front of the head.

The right time to prawn is during the two hours at the turn of the low tide, that is, the hour when the tide recedes to its lowest ebb and the hour in which it turns and begins to rise again. Two methods of fishing are commonly in use—one with the pole or spoon-net, the other with the gin-net. With the former the fisherman must be prepared to wade up to his waist, exploring the pools and gullies, and poking

From a photograph by J. Coster.

PRAWNING.

PLATE XII.

hither and thither among the overhanging seaweed for his prey. On a good tide a dexterous fisherman with the spoon-net may capture as many as two hundred or three hundred prawns.

Fishing with the gin is, perhaps, more generally popular. It is a less laborious and less wetting pursuit, and partakes rather more of the nature of angling. The prawner is provided with a couple—or more if he chooses—of circular, leaded nets. Each "gin" has a half-hoop crossing it, to which is attached a 6-feet cord, carrying a couple of large corks. The net is baited with some lure, preferably crab, and gently lowered to the bottom of a sea gully. In a couple of minutes or so the top cork may be hoisted by means of the hooked pole and the net gently lifted upwards. If the venture is a lucky one, the fisherman may find within his gin as many as three, four, or even half a dozen fine prawns. I remember taking seven at one hoist during this last season. That, of course, is an exceptional catch.

Prawning with the gin-net is much favoured by ladies, many of whom make capital baskets. The best fishing is usually to be got close to the edge of the tide. With a fresh summer breeze and a blue sea in front of one, the white cliffs of Albion towering behind, plenty of prawns coming into the nets, and pleasant companions, there are few more delightful ways of spending an afternoon on the Sussex coast.

Let me try to depict an expedition of summer prawning. The tide is a morning one, and it is necessary, therefore, to make an early start. Breakfast at seven o'clock on a morning in hot August is no great hardship, and, the party having assembled, we start off on cycles, duly equipped for the business of the day. A trouting creel is sometimes used as a receptacle for

captured prawns, but on the whole I have come to the conclusion that a small fishmonger's flag basket, slung over the shoulder by a piece of cord, is the handier for this style of fishing. A long, light, slimmish pole—preferably of the cheap bamboo procurable at any ironmonger's or furnishing place—is the best implement for hoisting out the nets. Such a pole, nine feet or ten feet in length, furnished at the top with a big hook, firmly bound on with copper wire, can be procured for as little as from 6*d.* to 9*d.* The gin-net is the most extravagant part of the outfit. This costs from 4*s.* 6*d.* to 6*s.* Gins, however, can be usually hired from fishermen or coastguards at from 3*d.* to 6*d.* apiece per day.

Between us and our fishing-place rises a huge mass of down—six hundred feet in height—the surmounting of which on a warm summer's morning, early even as we are, forms the hardest part of our day's exertions. We dismount and steadily face the long half-mile of collar work. This is at length achieved, and, the summit once gained, the rest of the journey is, on cycles, a mere pleasant downhill flitting of twenty minutes. Hot as we are with our exertions, the fresh breeze that greets us on the summit of the down is wonderfully refreshing, while the view alone well repays the toil. On the left stretches the blue sea, its far-off margin shrouded in a delicate summer haze. Some miles away on our front lies Seaford, beyond that Newhaven pier and harbour, backed by one of those bold cliffs of dazzling white which impressed so much the minds of Cæsar and his legionaries. Away to our right stretches league upon league of rolling downland.

The run downhill to the pleasant little village of East Dean is soon accomplished, and now turning left-handed we sweep through a broad open valley of the downs to Birling Gap. In this valley was gained one

of the chief victories of that mighty warrior, Ella, King of the South Saxons. Birling Gap is, as its name indicates, a flaw or gap in the huge rampart of cliff stretching from Beachy Head to Brighton, by which the shore is readily attainable. Here is a coastguard station, where our nets are taken care of, and whence we can usually procure our baits. Bait-catching, the troublesome search for elusive crabs, is a somewhat tedious process, and if the prawner has not provided for this necessary portion of the outfit before reaching the fishing-station, he should always allow at least an extra half-hour or more before the time when he starts fishing.

Our nets are duly baited, the crabs neatly skewered into the bottom of each net; and, having changed shoes and nether garments—it is always advisable, if possible, to take a change of knickerbockers or flannels with one—we proceed to the rocks. It is rather more than an hour and a half before low tide, and we have, therefore, plenty of time to get to our fishing-stations at the edge of yonder dark brown rocks; by this plan we have at least an hour and a quarter's fishing before the tide turns and comes in again, from which period we gain another full hour of what usually constitutes the best sport of the day.

We spread abroad in various batches, and scramble continuously over the rocks till we near the edge of the sea. Here the heat of the hot and dusty land has vanished; the breeze comes with a delightful coolness from the salt water, and we are speedily refreshed and recruited by the astonishing change of temperature. For the next two hours and a half, until the incoming tide drives us from the best stations, and the likelier prawning holes and gullies are filled, we enjoy sport of a varied but always alluring nature. Some of the party

are adepts, and you may see them picking out prawn after prawn from their nets, sometimes getting two or three at a hoist, and adding steadily to the bag. Others are less accustomed, or have less luck, and their take is proportionately smaller. Luck is, as with all fishing, an element that has to be reckoned with. Still, the skilled prawner, who knows the likelier bits of coastline and understands his or her art—and I know some extremely skilful lady prawners—may usually reckon, on a fair day and with a decent tide, to make a capital basket. With too smooth a sea and clear water, sport is, of course, poor; the prawns see and find out too much. A fresh tide and water well discoloured by sand are infinitely to be preferred.

One youngster of our party, armed with a long spoon-net, is wading up to his mid-thighs in all the deeper gullies, shovelling and dibbling gently underneath the rich brown beard of seaweed that fringes all the rocks. His bag is usually the best, as indeed it deserves to be, for the work is much harder and infinitely wetter. Once during the morning he has an adventure with a conger eel, which he finds left by the tide in a long and deepish pool. For twenty minutes the slippery fish evades his efforts; boy and eel scour madly fifty times up and down the sandy floor of the long gully. At last perseverance has its reward, and the youngster hoicks out quite a fair-sized conger on to a spit of sand, and succeeds in capturing it. Five and a quarter pounds it weighs some hours later. That eel, by the way, formed the chief component parts of a most excellent pie, the recipe for which may, perchance, interest the reader. Here it is:—

Skin and wash two pounds of eel; cut into pieces two inches long, and line the bottom of the pie-dish with force-meat. Put in the eel and sprinkle it with

parsley, shalots, nutmeg, seasoning, and the juice of half a lemon, and cover with puff-paste. Bake for one hour, or rather more. Make a quarter of a pint of béchamel sauce hot, and pour it into the pie.

I first learnt the virtues of conger pie years ago at Westward Ho, in North Devon, where, from the end of a rickety iron pier long since destroyed by the sea, we used with hand lines to catch great store of cod, skate, congers, and other good fish. Some of the congers were monsters; one I remember weighed nineteen pounds—a pretty burden to drag home with other goodly fish on a dark night between 12 and 1 a.m. A smallish conger, say from five pounds to ten pounds, makes, in my opinion, the best pie; and readers who have not ventured upon such a dish may take my word for it that it forms (hot, of course) a most excellent dainty, rich, savoury, and of delicate flavour. There is another fish pie I know of which is even more alluring. This is hot lobster pie, a luxury I have only tasted in the west of Ireland. Here lobsters are extraordinarily cheap, and you may get as many as you want from the fisher-folk of Galway and Mayo, in the country districts, for fourpence apiece. A dish of greater excellence than hot lobster pie it would be hard to find.

Now, driven off by the freshening tide, we quit the rocks, climb up through the cliff gap, and upon the grassy slope count our bag. Six hundred and ten prawns is the score, variously composed. The lad with the spoon-net has the best record, contributing as he does a hundred and sixty to the total. This is one of the good days, and the prawns run mostly large. Among wielders of the gin-nets ninety-six is the biggest total; the second best score is made by a lady who brings in eighty-three prawns. Two small lobsters have also

been captured. Altogether this is a fair if not a very great morning's sport. Still, it is good enough, and all are well content.

Lunch, a most pleasant *al fresco* meal, follows. Then a rest, a pipe or two, and perchance even a nap under yonder patch of shade. Afterwards a ramble along the cliff towards Cuckmere Haven, and the ever-welcome tea, and home. A bronzed and cheery party cycle their way back together over the down road, all agreeing that a more pleasant, healthful, or invigorating way of passing a summer's day is not easily to be found.

Baths and a change find us prepared for the evening meal, at which a delicious *hors d'œuvre* in the shape of a huge dish of brilliant scarlet prawns is not the least attractive feature. Fresh cooked prawns, by the way, are at least fifty per cent. better eating than prawns bought from the slab of a fishmonger's shop, where they have been stewing probably during the greater part of a July or August day.

CHAPTER XVII

BRITISH BIRDS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Many migrants between Great Britain and South Africa—A long list—The osprey—Peregrine and other raptorials—Nightjar—Its brief sojourn—Chimney swallow and swift—Roller and bee-eater—The warblers—Golden oriole—Fly-catchers and shrikes—The cuckoo—Turtle-dove unknown in South Africa—Quail and plovers—The white stork—Herons and bitterns—Wading birds—Rails and crakes—The moorhen in South Africa—Grebes and other birds.

A LIST of all the birds found alike in England and the whole continent of Africa would be too long to deal with in the space of a chapter, but it may be of interest to notice those birds which frequent both the British Islands and the countries south of the Zambesi River. While shooting and travelling in South Africa I was long ago struck with the presence of some of our well-known British birds. The subject interested me so much that I followed it up, and my list of species is now a fairly long one. The osprey—one of the noblest, although now, unhappily, one of the rarest of our British birds—is remarkably cosmopolitan in its range, and although not by any means common in South Africa, it has yet been identified there by competent observers. In Natal it was years ago noticed by Mr. Ayres, the well-known naturalist, frequenting salt-water lakes near the sea. The true peregrine (*Falco peregrinus*) has never, I believe, been identified in South Africa, but is represented there by a similar, though smaller and darker, species, *Falco minor*,

known to the Dutch as *spervel*. The hobby is fairly well known south of the Zambesi, making its appearance, in common with the majority of the migrants, towards the rainy season. Like so many of the numerous raptorial birds in South Africa, it is extremely partial to locusts and white ants. After warm rain swarms of the last-named pests will often suddenly soar upon the wing and fill the air. Enormous numbers of hawks and kites then appear to prey upon them. I myself have seen certainly many hundreds of red-footed falcons and other hawks thus engaged. The number of birds of prey in South Africa is to the naturalist one of the greatest of marvels. How they all manage to obtain a living is, in truth, one of nature's supremest puzzles. The red-footed falcon (*Falco vespertinus*), just referred to, sometimes called the orange-legged hobby, which appears in such astonishing numbers, has been observed at least a score of times in England, and is counted amongst the rarer British birds. Our familiar kestrel occasionally strays so far south as South Africa, and has been shot in Damaraland. Other kestrels, not known in England, are found in that and various other parts of Africa. The sparrow-hawk breeds in North Africa, but is not known in South Africa, although it is there represented by several near relations. The honey buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*), a summer visitor to England, has been identified in Natal, but seems to be rare in the south. The black kite (*Milvus migrans*) has occurred at least once in England. This bold and fearless bird is in South Africa extraordinarily abundant, and, like many other migrants, arrives there towards the end of the year, when the rains fall. It is more partial to the western side of the country than any other. The common kite, once well known in Britain, and still occasionally to be seen, is found in North

Africa, but apparently never visits the south of that continent. Montagu's harrier, a well-known British species, is not common south of the Zambesi, though it has occasionally been procured there. Like other harriers, it is to be seen carefully beating the ground over which it passes, much after the fashion of a sporting dog, in quest of reptiles, frogs, mice, and young waterfowl.

Quitting the birds of prey, we come to the nightjar (*Caprimulgus Europæus*), which, after spending the summer with us, goes to Africa and Asia for the winter, passing through the Nile Valley and East Africa. This bird, it is worth noting, makes a somewhat shorter stay with us than other migratory birds; it does not reach England, as a rule, until the beginning of May, and by the end of September has departed for its winter quarters in Africa.

That ever-welcome visitor the chimney swallow is familiar in many parts of South Africa. I have watched it with feelings of keen delight in various parts of Cape Colony, in the streets of Kimberley, perched on the telegraph wires, on the wide grass plains of Bechuanaland, and in the Transvaal. It was a pleasant thing indeed to note these little wanderers, reminding one of cooler northern climes amidst the parched scenes of South Africa. The well-known European swift is also common in South Africa. Most of the European swallows leave Cape Colony for their northern tour by the end of March. The swifts stay later in the South, and do not finally disappear till late in April. There can, I think, be little doubt that large numbers of swallows and swifts seen in England during our summer have "trekked" through the Dark Continent from the shores of Southern Africa.

The European roller (*Coracias garrula*) is better

known in Central and Southern Europe than in England. Yet as stragglers occasionally make their way to this country it has come to be regarded as a British bird. Rollers are birds of handsome plumage, usually exhibiting brilliant blendings of blue, purple, lilac, green, and rufous, and are about the size of our well-known jays. They have some affinity to the crow family, especially in the shape of the bill and feet, and have received their name "roller" from a trick of rolling or tumbling in the air while in flight. Like crows and jays, these birds are garrulous, restless, and pugnacious; they are fond of wooded country, and among the pleasant acacia forests north of the Orange River may be seen flashing hither and thither with brilliant plumage. The European roller is well known in certain parts of the interior of South Africa, usually during the rainy season. During January, 1891, while travelling between Taungs, British Bechuanaland, and Kimberley, I saw large numbers, many of them resting upon the telegraph wires. The summer rains were unusually abundant that season, and these birds seemed to have been attracted further south and in greater numbers than usual.

Among birds of brilliant colouring none are more beautiful or more interesting than the lovely bee-eaters, of which one species (*Merops apiaster*) is an occasional visitor to this country. It is characterised by its buff-and-green forehead, black ear tufts, green wings and tail, orange back, rufous neck and shoulders, blue-green under parts, and golden-orange chin and throat, below which is a dark band. It is well known in South Africa, where it arrives towards August, usually about the time of the quail migration. The Boers know this bird as the *berg schawler* (mountain swallow). In South Africa its food consists largely of a red wasp, which

From a photograph by Major H. Moore.

REDSHANK NESTING: IRELAND.

From a photograph by Major H. Moore.

NEST OF REDSHANK: IRELAND.

is seized deftly across the middle of the body, pinched once or twice with the mandibles, and then swallowed. Our English Hoopoe, which it is a pleasure to know is still to be observed in early spring and summer in various parts of this country, although a bird of Africa, does not penetrate so far south as the Zambesi. It is represented in South Africa by a smaller species, whose cry of "Hoop, hoop" is familiar in many a forest and by many a mimosa-margined river-bed.

I come now to those melodious singers whose sweet voices, heard in English copses, fields, and gardens during April, tell us that at last spring is here. The sedge warbler, the garden warbler, the melodious willow warbler, and our familiar willow wren are all known in South Africa, whither they migrate after their summer visit to Europe. Several species of wheatears are to be found south of the Zambesi, but not our British *Saxicola œnanthe*, which apparently penetrates no further into the African continent than Egypt. The blue-headed yellow wag-tail, a bird which visits Great Britain, but rarely breeds here, finds it way to South Africa, usually appearing towards the rainy season. The tawny pipit, a little-known bird in England, though occasionally noted on our southern coastline, ranges as far south as Cape Colony, although better known in North Africa and Palestine. The beautiful golden oriole, a bird which would be commoner in England than it now is if gunners were less impulsive and collectors less acquisitive, is not very plentiful in South Africa. It appears there, however, in Natal, Damaraland, Bechuanaland, and elsewhere, towards the rainy season.

Our well-known spotted flycatcher, which ranges from the southern shores of the Cape of Good Hope to Lapland, is also well known in South Africa. This charming little bird is more abundant north of the

Orange River, and has been observed most plentifully in Damaraland and Great Namaqualand. I have seen it occasionally in British Bechuanaland. The pied flycatcher, curiously enough, although well known in North Africa and Gambia, is apparently not a visitor to southern Africa. The red-backed shrike — our well-known butcher bird—as well as the lesser grey shrike, are familiar birds south of the Zambesi, as, indeed, are many other shrikes unknown to Europe. Upon the whole, the lesser grey shrike, which is much scarcer in England than the red-backed species, may be pronounced the more abundant of the two in southern Africa. The woodchat (*Lanius pomeranus*) was said by Le Vaillant to be found in South Africa, but no other observer since his day has been able to identify it. The great grey shrike, a winter visitor to the British Islands, is unknown south of the Zambesi.

Our well-known cuckoo is occasionally met with in South Africa, but is not so well known as some of the other and more brilliant cuckoos—the splendid golden and emerald cuckoos, for example — for which that country is famous. Among the fifteen species which have been identified south of the Zambesi, the Cape cuckoo (*Cuculus gularis*), well known in the interior, bears a strong resemblance to its European congener, and is sometimes mistaken for it.

Doves and pigeons, often of the most beautiful colours, are extraordinarily abundant in South Africa, and their tender cooing is one of the most familiar of veldt sounds wherever bush or trees are to be found. Yet, singularly enough, the familiar turtledove, which arrives in England towards the beginning of May, is unknown so far south. This bird winters in North Africa and the warmer parts of Western Asia.

The European quail, which, although much rarer

than it used to be in these islands, still finds its way to Britain, migrates in its autumn passage as far south as the southern shores of Cape Colony, and is well known all over South Africa. It arrives at the Cape usually towards the end of August, and in some seasons is to be found in immense numbers. As I have pointed out elsewhere, excellent bags of these diminutive game-birds are made by South African sportsmen. The European quail breeds freely at the Cape, chiefly among standing crops.

Plovers are plentiful in South Africa, and among them are to be found several well-known British species. The grey plover, in its winter plumage, is a familiar object along the Cape coastline. The golden plover is a rare visitant so far south, but has been identified. The Kentish plover is occasionally to be seen along the South African littoral, especially along the shores of Damaraland and Namaqualand; while the dainty little ring-plover, also well known along our British sands, is to be noted occasionally, with its brisk, twinkling run, upon the maritime fringes of South Africa. All these birds breed—as do so many others of the plovers, sandpipers, snipes, and other waders found in South Africa—in northern Europe or northern Asia, and the extent of their migration is therefore a very large one. Various theories have been put forth to account for this enormous range north and south, though none seem at present to be quite satisfactory. Another well-known British bird in this group, the turnstone (*Strepsilas interpres*), is frequently to be seen along the shore-line of Cape Colony and other regions of South Africa, where I have watched it with much interest.

That well-known European bird, the white stork, is now—owing doubtless to persecution—rare in Great Britain, although specimens are occasionally seen.

Only a year or two back one of these fine birds was seen in Sussex, between Brede and Rye, and, for a wonder, was not shot. The white stork migrates to South Africa, and is there known as the great locust bird, from its devotion to the swarms of locusts upon which, with many other kinds of bird, it delights to prey. It breeds also in South Africa, and has the good sense to place its nest in the vicinity of swarms of young locusts, which thus furnish food for the young birds. The fact of its nesting in Central Europe as well as in South Africa supports the theory that certain migratory birds nest twice in the year, north and south of the equator.

Few English people probably are aware that our common heron is well known in South Africa. Yet such is the case. It is curious that at the Cape these herons, instead of building in trees as in Europe, often make their nests among tufts of grass and rushes surrounded by water. The beautiful purple heron and the squacco heron, which are classed among the rarer British birds, are also found in Southern Africa.

The lesser egret (*Ardea garzetta*), now a rare British bird, is fairly common in South Africa, especially towards the lake and river regions of the interior. These lovely birds, with their snowy habiliments and long plumes, are often found in presence of large game, and may be seen where buffaloes are plentiful, perching upon the backs and withers of these animals in the most unconcerned fashion. The buffalo on his part seems to have no objection to the companionship. Yet other British birds of the heron family found south of the Zambesi are the bittern, little bittern, and night heron. The bittern, which once bred freely among the marshes of the dreary fen country, is known to the Boers of South Africa as the *roerdomp*.

We come now to a well-known and interesting group of British wading birds, strongly represented in South Africa. These are the curlew, whimbrel, redshank, wood sandpiper, common sandpiper, avocet, stilt, ruff and reeve, knot, curlew-sandpiper, little stint, sanderling, and great or solitary snipe. Of these many are quite abundant and well known in various parts of South Africa. The curlew is fairly common, and in places is to be met with throughout the year. Its nest has, I believe, never been found in South Africa. The whimbrel is rare; the redshank and green sandpiper are fairly common, found usually about the estuaries of various South African rivers, and at times about vleis and marshes. The greenshank is quite a familiar South African bird, found all over the country. I have myself noticed it from the Cape to Ngamiland. The dusky or spotted redshank (*Totanus fuscus*), a rare migrant to Britain, is also extremely scarce in South Africa. The late Mr. E. L. Layard, a first-rate naturalist, himself procured it, however, some thirty years ago, at the Knysna, in Cape Colony, and it is probable that others of these birds have visited South Africa without being identified. The wood sandpiper (*Totanus glareola*), occasionally noted in Britain, and known once at least to have bred here, is only fairly abundant in South Africa. C. J. Andersson was of opinion that it bred occasionally in Damaraland. This point, however, has never been set at rest. This bird has a very wide range, migrating south, after its spring and summer stay in North Europe and Asia, not only as far as South Africa, but to India and even Australia. The common sandpiper is not very abundant in South Africa, but it is to be met with sparingly in various parts of the country. The elegant avocet and the long-legged stilt plover, which are but rare British birds,

are very well known all over South Africa. I have watched them both, always with the greatest interest and admiration, in various parts of the country, even upon temporary rain vleis on the verge of the dry Kalahari desert.

Ruffs and reeves (*Machetes pugnax*) are quite familiar birds in South Africa. There, however, like most others of this group, they appear only in winter plumage, and the male bird is destitute of the ruff, from which it takes its English name. In South Africa these birds are fairly tame, and may be noticed in small bands of from three to a dozen. The knot is rare in South Africa, but may occasionally be observed among flights of stints, sanderlings, and curlew-sandpipers upon the coastline. Little stints, curlew-sandpipers, and sanderlings, all familiar British birds, are common in most parts of South Africa, either about vleis and marshes inland, or along the sea shores and estuaries.

Some sportsmen in South Africa have supposed that our common British snipe reaches Cape Colony. I do not think, however, that this is the case, and I know of no properly authenticated instance of its doing so. It has been recorded in Africa along the Upper Nile and in the Gambia country, but never yet I believe further south. That much rarer bird, the great or solitary snipe, often called the double snipe (*Gallinago major*), is, however, well known south of the Zambesi, and with the handsome painted snipe (*Rhynchæa Capensis*) affords capital shooting to those who are fond of this kind of sport. Both the double snipe and the painted snipe breed in Cape Colony.

Among rails and crakes several of our British species are found also in South Africa. The well-known water-rail (*Rallus aquaticus*) of England and other parts of Europe has been identified in Natal, but must, I think,

From a photograph by Major H. Moore.

NEST OF SANDPIPER.

PLATE XIV.

be very rare in its occurrence. It winters certainly in North Africa, and there is no reason why individuals should not occasionally migrate south of the equator. Baillon's crake, a handsome species, which occasionally breeds in Britain, is often plentiful in South Africa in the more marshy parts of the country. It is very difficult to flush, and thus escapes frequent observation. The landrail, or corncrake, so familiar to our farmers in summer and to sportsmen in September, is well known in Natal, but rare in Cape Colony. Its preference for Natal is easily accounted for: that colony, with its heavier rainfall and more abundant vegetation, affords a much more attractive feeding-ground than the drier regions of Cape Colony.

The British moorhen is well known in South Africa, where it breeds in February and March. Curiously enough, however, the number of eggs produced—usually from two to four—is less than is the case with these birds nesting in Europe, where from five or six to as many as eight and ten eggs are produced.

Among grebes—the crested grebe, the eared grebe, and the little grebe or dabchick, all British birds—are found in South Africa. Passing to sea-birds, the storm petrel, or Mother Carey's chicken, a fairly well-known British species, is, according to the late C. J. Andersson, common upon the south-west coast of Africa. Among gulls, the common skua, the pomatorhine skua, and Richardson's skua occur both in Britain and South Africa, the latter being quite common in Table Bay during the summer months. Among terns, the Caspian tern, common tern, Sandwich tern, whiskered tern, and white-winged black tern (the two last named only rare British birds) are all well known in South Africa, sometimes, as in the case of the white-winged black tern, inland, but more often upon the coastline. Finally, it

is well established that our familiar cormorant is fairly abundant at times along the shore-line of South Africa. This bird, in fact, has, like many other British species, a very wide range, and is found from Greenland to South Africa, and from Eastern North America to the Mediterranean and Asia.

It is, I think, a matter of some interest to find so many of our British birds denizens of or frequent visitors to so far off a country as southern Africa. It is more than probable that in the next few years fresh recruits may be found for the catalogue of birds common to both countries. Already, upon going through my list, I am able to count no less than seventy-two species thus cosmopolitan.

CHAPTER XVIII

CORMORANTS AND ANGLERS

The sea-fisher's indifference—Hatred of fresh-water anglers for this bird—Voracity and digestion—Exempted from protection in certain districts—Montagu's captive cormorant—Cormorant's daily consumption—Cape fisheries—Enormous flights of cormorant—Uses of these birds—Combined fishing raids—Pelicans—Habits of cormorants—Shags—Do cormorants use their wings under water?—An object-lesson—Milton's comparison—"As greedy as a cormorant."

THE sea-fisher views with a more or less careless indifference the greedy cormorant. He is no great lover of his feathered rival, but there are still plenty of fish in the salt water for them both. But it is not so with the angler in fresh water, who knows too well the ravages made by these birds on trout and young salmon, which, in these days of a thousand rods, where thirty years ago there were but fifty, can ill be spared. And so the trout fisher, if, as occasionally happens, he goes out upon the tide with some weather-beaten man of the salt water, and notes the cormorant sitting upon some rock or pole near the river-bar, sunning its bronze-black back and getting up an appetite for its next onslaught upon the fishes, tries to inoculate his brother of the sea with some of his own natural hatred against this feathered hog of the shore-line. And, in truth, he has some reason for his hate. Of all creatures, the cormorant is perhaps the most voracious; he has a marvellously rapid digestion—not so rapid, perhaps, as that lightning swallower

and digester, the locust bird of South Africa, a bird of incredible help to the South African farmer—and the amount of damage he does is, in an over-fished country, very serious. So much has this fact been recognised of late, and so frequent have been the complaints made within the last year or two against the cormorants in the West of England, where their numbers have greatly increased, that the Devon County Council have now excluded these birds from their protected list under the Wild Birds Protection Acts. The Exe Board of Conservators are but too fully aware of the depredations of cormorants upon young *Salmonidæ* and other fish, and have for some time been taking steps to reduce their numbers. Funds have been raised, a campaign has been set on foot, and rewards are offered for the destruction of these birds. The Dart Conservators have taken similar action, and offered a premium of 1*s*. for every cormorant or shag killed in their district.

The cormorant, in whatever part of the world he lives and whatever be his species, is an extraordinarily expert fisherman and diver. He has a strong natural instinct to devour, and the very presence of water, even without the sign of a fish, at once arouses this desire. Colonel Montagu once had a young cormorant in captivity. He noted that, at the sight of water, the bird became restless, and when liberated it dived incessantly for a considerable time, until it had completely satisfied itself that no fish were to be found. There seems to be no reason to doubt Montagu's statement that an average cormorant will easily devour and digest three or four pounds of fish twice a day. It will be readily conceded that when one of these birds can plunder the sea and rivers of seven or eight pounds of fish during each day, the toll taken annually in a single district where cormorants happen to be numerous must be enormous.

On the coastline of South Africa I have always been struck with astonishment by two things—the teeming plenty of the Cape fisheries and the incredible numbers of cormorants. Here the superabundance of the one is kept down by the apparently inordinate plenty of the other. I have stood on the shore-line of Cape Colony and watched the daily flight of tens of thousands of Cape cormorants (*Graculus Capensis*) going to, or returning from, their day's fishing. The numbers of these birds seem perfectly incredible unless one has actually witnessed their assembled legions. The late C. J. Andersson, who observed them on the coast of Great Namaqualand, says of them: "At some seasons of the year they may be counted not merely by tens or even hundreds of thousands, but by millions; their numbers, in fact, exceed all computation; for it is no unusual thing to see a deep, unbroken line of these birds winging their way for two or even three successive hours to, or from, their feeding-grounds." At the Cape, however, the cormorants are not the useless and expensive pests they are in England. They are, in fact, next to the gannets and penguins, the greatest contributors to those vast and fertile deposits of guano which are to be found on so many rocks and islets from the Cunene River to Table Bay. Under the Dutch name *duiker*, or diver, the Cape cormorants are familiar objects at Cape Town. There are two or three species of them. Besides being marvellously expert fishers single-handed, these birds often act with great address and acuteness in combination. A score of them will form in line near the shore and range about until they discover a shoal of small fish. Spreading out, they drive the fish ashore and enjoy a rich banquet among the rocks, sand, and salt water. Pelicans, those great first cousins of the cormorant, pursue exactly the same

tactics, and I have watched with intense interest the fishing drives of these birds on the Botletli River, in the Ngami country. In these forays the tremendous beating of their great wings upon the water—a pelican's wing will measure nine feet eight inches from tip to tip—acts naturally with terrifying and most successful results upon the demoralised fish.

The British cormorant, is, by preference, a frequenter of salt or brackish water; yet he will, especially in winter, fish diligently in fresh water some way inland. Here, too, he breeds occasionally, near some lake or reservoir. More commonly the nest is found by the sea, on cliffs or rock-stacks, or in some cave, or upon a quiet islet. The nest consists of sea-tang, rushes, sticks, and grasses, and where the birds are numerous the neighbourhood is, from the stench of decomposing fish and excreta, horribly unpleasant. The eggs are usually three in number. The young birds feed literally down the throats of their mothers, thrusting their heads and bills well in and greedily taking the food regurgitated for them by their doting parents. The pelican feeds her young much in the same manner, and it is probable that the old and pleasing fable of that bird piercing her own breast and feeding her nestlings with her life-blood may have arisen from the mess of blood and fishy matter which escapes from her crop on to her breast on these occasions.

The shag, or green cormorant, sometimes known as the crested cormorant (*Phalacrocorax graculus*), is by casual observers often mistaken for the common cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*). It is, however, readily to be distinguished by its smaller size and green colouring, the common cormorant being much blacker in hue. The shag breeds for the most part on our western coastline, while the cormorant is to be

From a photograph by R. B. Lodge.

CORMORANT.

PLATE XV.

found nesting on nearly every portion of our shores, excepting between the Humber and Thames. The nesting habits of both birds are very similar. The shag is, however, it is to be remembered, seen much more rarely upon inland waters than its big cousin, and is essentially a bird of the salt water and seashore.

Cormorants and shags swim deep in the water, and seem to experience a good deal of difficulty in getting under way and into the air. Once upon the wing, however, their flight is a strong one, and although they display little of the aerial grace and ease of so many of the birds, they are good and rapid flyers and can travel long distances.

Their powers of swimming and diving are wonderfully developed, and they can remain under water for a considerable period, as, indeed, they need to do when chasing quick, elusive fish in their own element. Not long ago there was an animated discussion in the *Field* as to whether these birds use their wings when under water. Several writers protested that they do not, and alleged that the feet only are used when the shag or cormorant is pursuing its prey beneath the surface. Personally I have no doubt that these birds use both wings and feet as propelling forces. I have watched them under water, and, like many other observers, I have, beyond any question of doubt, seen the wings used very rapidly and very powerfully on these occasions. There could not have been a better object-lesson in this matter of propulsion than the cormorant shown at the Fisheries Exhibition in London some years back. This cormorant, which was a great attraction, was, for weeks together, at stated hours, fed with living fish, for the amusement of visitors. The fish used to be thrown into a large tank, having a plate glass front, and the whole diving and chasing process

was displayed most closely and effectively. From the platform on which it stood expectant, the cormorant used to dive in, and, using its wings with marvellous rapidity, followed its prey through every twist and turn until it had secured it. In such a confined space the fish had no chance of escape, and was speedily bagged, or rather pouched by the insatiable bird. But so good a performer is the cormorant under water that even where there is plenty of sea room a fish must be particularly active to escape this bird when he is hungry and means business.

The cormorant, with his dark, heavy form and slouching manners, his staring, fierce green eyes, and his insatiable habits, is by no means a pleasant or an attractive bird. Few people, even among lovers of nature, care much about him; by anglers he is loathed as heartily as the very fiend himself. Milton seems to have been quite of the fisherman's way of thinking. He describes Satan as entering paradise in the shape of one of these birds.

> "Up he flew, and on the tree of life
> Sat like a comorant—devising death
> To them that lived."

Surely a very striking image this!

The Chinese, it is well known, have for ages tamed and utilised the cormorant to aid them in fishing. It is not so well known that these birds were, in the days of hawking, occasionally employed in England in the same manner. Whitelock, an old writer, tell us "that he had a cast of them manned like hawks, which would come to hand." He relates that the best of his birds was one presented to him by Mr. Wood, "Master of the Cormorants to Charles I." Willughby, speaking of this sport in England, says, "When they (the sportsmen) come to the rivers, take off their hoods,

and having tied a leather thong round the lower part of their (the cormorants') neck, that they may not swallow the fish they catch, they throw them into the river." Each cormorant captured, according to Willughby, five or six fish, which were one after another vomited up "a little bruised." Then, the string being loosed from the birds' necks, leaving the passage to the stomach open, "for their reward" each cormorant was fed with a fish or two, dexterously caught by the expectant creatures. The Chinese follow much the same practice, and pass a ring round the throats of their cormorants to prevent the fish taken being irretrievably swallowed.

"As greedy as a cormorant" is a well-known expression. I once heard from a brother angler in Norway an excellent story—a true one—concerning a too predaceous fisherman. He was a country curate and a very keen fly-fisher. For some time he had had his eye upon a fine piece of water, strictly preserved by a neighbouring squire. In due season the squire gave him a day's fishing, and the curate, rising very early, made a great—an abnormal—bag. Unhappily for him, a keeper chanced to get a sight of the catch, and reported it to the squire, who was furious. Time went on, and a living in the gift of the said squire became vacant. The curate, among others, applied for it. He got but a postcard in reply, and on the card only these words were written: "Sir, I would sooner give my living to a cormorant!"

CHAPTER XIX

A HARE IN THE SNOW

A peasant of 1537—Bitter winter—A poor cottage—The knight of the shire—Out into the snow—The hare's trail—The kill—Sir Edmund Wing—The poacher's terror—The tracker tracked—The arrogance of wealth—A tragedy—The midnight journey—A ghastly burden—The oak and its secret.

ON a bitter winter's morning of the year 1537, Thomas Goodwin, peasant, rose from his pallet, shifted the sheepskin coverlet more over his wife and babe, and in the half-darkness began to array himself for the field. That was no long matter, for the rustic of that day slept just as the back-country Boer of South Africa does at the present time—mainly in his clothes. Inside the cottage the air was nipping indeed. Without, the whole land lay lapped in snow and spell-bound under one of the grimmest frosts of the century.

Thomas awoke in no happy mood this dark January morning. He was out of work and nearly starving; his wife lay abed with her first child, now but ten days old. Do what he could, he knew not where to turn for a day's wage, and food must be got somehow. A pound or two of fat bacon still remained to them, and less than a quarter of a sack of rough meal; but for the kindness of a good-hearted widow in the neighbouring hamlet, who had hitherto sent his wife a trifle of milk each day, the great, helpless giant knew that his wife and child could scarce have won through the bad times

that were upon them. For, indeed, Thomas Goodwin was very helpless, and that from no possible fault of his own. The peasant of King Harry the Eighth's day was in some respects a better and a happier man than his predecessor; villeinage was a thing of the past; yet he was still little else than a serf, and a serf too often in the hands of a hard and grudging aristocracy.

Thomas Goodwin, strong of thews, a giant in stature, and a willing worker, was just now, by no fault of his own, in hard case. He had wrought for the neighbouring priory until the dissolution of the monasteries, and since that vast upheaval he had been field-labourer to a small yeoman. But the constant growth of the wool industry and the spread of sheep throughout England had ruined the yeoman as it had ruined many of his kind. At Michaelmas he had given up the struggle, and his small patrimony had been acquired by the neighbouring lord of the manor, Sir Edmund Wing, knight of the shire.

Now, Sir Edmund was one who jumped alertly with the spirit of the times. He was a zealous—nay, a searching Protestant; and Thomas Goodwin had fallen under his displeasure for that, in his slow Saxon way, he had not turned his cloak of religion over-quickly. For three months had Thomas fought a losing battle with fortune. He had picked up odd work here and there, thanks mainly to the kindness of the humbler among his neighbours; but now he knew not where to turn for food. His meal would be out in a fortnight or less; flesh he had none save for the scrap of fat bacon; his wife ailed, and was growing weak for lack of nourishing food, and with her ailed also her babe. Thus Thomas Goodwin's thoughts this dark, freezing morning were bitter enough as he struggled into his

hard foot-gear and fastened some rude leggings of sheepskin about his brawny calves. The wood fire had all but died down. With the deftness of long experience he blew it up, nursed it into flame again, and cooked for his wife a warm mess of meal and water.

The flickering firelight fell upon the woman's face as she sat up in bed and took the porringer from her husband. It was a young and not uncomely face, despite dishevelled hair and the pallor of lying-in. As she took her food, spoonful by spoonful, she looked anxiously at her husband's gloomy countenance and knitted brows. Where was he going? she asked him. To Thonfield, a neighbouring village, he answered, to see if by any chance he might get work there. The great, gaunt fellow kissed his wife, piled more wood upon the fire, and then arrayed himself for his walk. On his head he pressed firmly down an old cap of rabbit-skin; over this and his shoulders he drew a short threadbare hooded cloak of faded green frieze; upon his rough, chapped hands he drew a pair of thick hedgecutter's gloves; then, buckling a broad belt round his smock, and taking a strong, crab-tree staff from the chimney-corner, he unlatched the door and stepped out into the frigid, cheerless morning. It was bitter cold indeed. The icy blast smote upon the man's cheeks with Arctic rigour; from the cottage thatch hung long icicles, enchained a month since by the fetters of that pitiless frost; the sky was dull and leaden, and that curious, numbing cold which betokens the near approach of heavy snow was in the air.

Thomas Goodwin tramped steadily through the snow. Crossing a belt of woodland, which lay between him and the more open country, he presently entered upon a spreading stretch of grass-land—now sheeted in with

snow—which formed a corner of the great park of the lord of the manor, Sir Edmund Wing. Before him, twelve miles distant, rolled the great range of the South Downs, their smooth, rounded contours, now white with snow, showing up boldly against the dark and lowering sky. The ancient footpath which led across this angle of the park was hidden by snowfalls; but Thomas had traversed it a thousand times, and had no difficulty in making out his way. He saw little on his march to divert his gloomy thoughts, although his eyes and senses were alert enough. A flight of fieldfares, chattering round a great haw-bush in the woodland, from whose berries they were devouring a hearty meal, attracted his attention. He looked hungrily at them; half a dozen of them would make a delicate meal for his sick wife; but, at the moment, he had no means of killing a single one of them, and with a sigh he passed them by. As he crossed the corner of the park his gaze not unnaturally wandered to the great house of Cleathercote, a corner of which, half a mile away among the trees, caught his eye. Within those warm, red-brick, castellated walls dwelt, in high comfort and honour, Sir Edmund Wing. Thomas Goodwin sighed again to himself; the load of his present misery lay chiefly at the charge of the knight, who had had much to do with the ousting of the priors and the dissolution of their establishment, and who had bought up his late master the yeoman, and now refused him work, and that in the most pitiless winter for many a long year.

Just before he came to the high stile which gave exit from the park to the arable fields beyond, Goodwin suddenly halted. Something in the snow arrested his attention. His blue eyes glittered as he noted the tale spread out there so plainly upon the white surface. A

great hare had come lopping down the park, picking its way delicately through the snowy covering, passing beneath the stile, and moving out over the fields beyond. The man's hungry eyes were riveted upon those delicate footprints. To him they meant so much. If he could but secure that hare, his wife would fare sumptuously upon the rich flesh and broth for two days at least, even if he himself picked a bone or two.

Thomas looked round—not a figure showed anywhere upon the whole landscape. The keepers, he well knew, were on the other side of the park, looking to the feeding of the deer, which in this hard season were being assisted with the comforts of hay and straw. It was a risk; but Thomas's mind was quickly made up. The chances were much in his favour. The snow would be falling again in an hour or two, and his footprints and the hare's would be obliterated. This was a sequestered corner of the park, seldom visited by the knight or his servants. The man stepped out again, crossed the stile, and with swift, stealthy footsteps followed the tell-tale tracks that danced there in the snow before him. He was, like most peasants of that period, skilled in woodcraft, and had a pretty shrewd idea whither the hare was making its way. The instinct of the wild creature warned it of a heavy storm of snow about to descend; the wind was shrewdly piercing across the open park, and the animal was now on its way to some warmer and more cosy shelter. Steadily the man pressed forward; over two or three arable fields, across a meadow of old pasture, and thence to a wide fringe of gorse and bracken, which here, upon the southern side, hemmed in the outskirts of a large tract of woodland.

The tale, told so plainly in the snow, came to an end

just as Thomas Goodwin had expected. There was much less snow here than within half a dozen miles. Passing a thick piece of bracken, below a warm, sheltering wall of dark green gorse, the man's keen eye noted the brown skin of a great doe-hare, nestling snugly in the form in which she had so recently ensconced herself. His eye carefully avoided hers; if they had met, ten to one the hare would have leaped out and fled incontinently. He looked carelessly beyond, as if he had never seen her; but just as he passed her he gave one swift whirl of his crab-tree staff, which, crashing into the skull of the hare, stretched her instantly dead. She gave one convulsive kick with her strong hind-feet, and lay there in her form quite still. As Goodwin picked her up by her hind-legs a few drops of blood fell upon the snow, leaving neat circular patches of crimson staining the pure, untrodden surface. Goodwin hastily kicked some snow over the tell-tale gouts, and then, undoing his belt and bestowing the hare beneath his smock, he belted up again, picked up his staff, and with elastic footsteps plunged into the woodland and betook himself by another and more sheltered way back to his cottage again.

Within an hour the hare was skinned, cut up, and simmering in an iron pot, while Thomas and his wife, wonderfully brightened by this unexpected piece of good fortune, were devising fresh plans for the future.

But, alas! Goodwin's successful raid upon the hare had not been entirely unperceived. Just as Thomas crossed that angle of the park and first caught sight of the footprints and halted, Sir Edmund Wing had entered his dining-hall, and before falling to breakfast, happened to be surveying the landscape, musing upon

the length of the frost, the prospect of more snow, and the welfare of his deer. At that moment a figure came into view, crossing the corner of his park. It was a dull, dark morning; but Sir Edmund Wing had a keen eye, and he noticed that the figure paused a moment, as if to look about, before passing on. The knight's brow contracted; he watched the figure till it became lost in the wintry gloom, and then turned to the table. Breakfast was a hearty meal at Cleathercote Manor; a great fire burned bravely on the open hearth; Lady Wing and her two children were already seated; the knight fell vigorously to his repast. A plate of brawn, a slice or two of venison pasty, a couple of manchets, and a flagon of good ale, and Sir Edmund rose, refreshed and strengthened. Presently, after an interview with his steward, he called for his outdoor gear. A pair of long brown boots, reaching to his mid-thighs, were brought to him; into these he struggled, and then, stamping about the hall to get his feet well home, was assisted by a serving-man into a warm cloak of thick plum-coloured cloth, trimmed with fur, reaching below his hips. Now setting a broad, flat cap of the same material jauntily on the side of his head, and thrusting his white hands into leather gauntlets, the knight took his staff and sallied forth. First looking at his stables and seeing that his horses were well strawed and tended, he set off at a brisk pace down the long avenue of elms planted by his grandfather fifty years before, when, in the second year of Henry the Seventh's reign, the building of the great manor-house of Cleathercote was begun. Towards the end of the avenue Sir Edmund turned away from the well-trodden path, beaten hard by many feet upon the snow, and plunged across the smooth white waste that lay before him. He ploughed his way steadily for

nearly two furlongs, and then suddenly came upon the traces he expected to find. The footprints told a clear tale, and the knight's broad brow again knit ominously. Here had a hare passed. There had the man halted, gazed, and, taking up the tracks, pursued his quarry.

Now, whether for his deer, his many partridges and rare pheasants, his hares, conies, or what not, no great freeholder in Sussex looked more jealously after his game, or was more tenacious of his sporting rights than was Sir Edmund Wing. Ten or twelve years before, in the fifteenth year of the reign of the present King Henry, the knight had busied himself in the passing of a statute in Parliament which provided for just such an offence as he now saw delineated in the snow before him. Thus ran the statute: "*None shall trace, destroy, or kill any Hare in the Snow, in pain of 6s. 8d. for every such Offence: which penalty assessed in Sessions shall go to the King; but in a Leet, to the Lord thereof.*"

With an exclamation of wrath and an angry thrust of his staff into the snow, the knight now set himself to follow the footprints of this man. Who was the varlet that dared thus to break the law upon his land? He had with ruthless severity extirpated a nest of deer-stealers who had once haunted his forests and raided his parks. Was he to be bearded by lesser ruffians? Surely not? He marched briskly through the snow, and presently came upon the scene of the hare's death. The quick eye of the sportsman saw readily the whole tragedy in little. Stooping somewhat, Sir Edmund deftly cleared away with his staff the snow which had been carelessly kicked up by Thomas Goodwin to cover up the traces of his capture. There, as he expected, were the signs of death, a red, circular stain or two,

where the hare's blood had dripped upon the spotless snow. It was enough; he now set himself to piece together the remaining fragments of the tale and run the miscreant to earth.

Meanwhile the dark, leaden sky had become more overcast. Flakes were beginning to descend lightly, the forerunners of a mighty fall; the north wind beat fiercely upon the knight, freezing his moustache and beard upon his ruddy face. He folded his cloak more tightly about him, and entered the woodland, still following the man's footsteps. In little more than half an hour he stood before the cottage of Thomas Goodwin. The snow fell now in thick, blinding flakes, which, whirled hither and thither by the fierce tempest, had wrapped the knight from head to foot in a mantle of white. For the last ten minutes all footprints had been obliterated; but Sir Edmund knew now where his quarry had taken refuge, and had struggled through the rising hurricane straight for the mud hovel where starved Thomas Goodwin and his wife. Alas, poor Thomas! If the snow had come but half an hour earlier you had been safe.

Without word or knock of warning, the knight of Cleathercote lifted the latch and entered the poor dwelling, vigorously shook the snow from his person, and looked about him. Poverty—dire, naked poverty—was stamped upon the whole interior. If the man had any sentiment of pity in his heart, it would surely have arisen at that moment to rebuke him. The tale of freezing penury, the poor, pallid woman sitting up on the miserable pallet yonder, clasping her infant to her breast, gazing at him with scared, awe-stricken eyes, should have melted the great man. His own handsome apparel and well-fed person, his plump, ruddy face and shining dark chestnut hair, all eloquent

of high living and prosperous content, contrasted aggressively with the wretched interior in which he stood. But in Sir Edmund's heart, in the stead of pity, only a fierce resentment burned. The rich smell of cooking which greeted his nostrils told him at once what had been the end of the hare. A bloody knife upon the table, the skin, and some entrails, completed the chain of evidence. He glanced from the woman to her husband, and his red-brown eyes blazed with wrath. The man, who had been stooping over his cooking-pot on the rude stone hearth, had straightened himself as the knight entered, and, making clumsy obeisance, now looked at him ruefully, tongue-tied, and with fear.

"So," said the knight in a harsh, angry voice, "'tis as I expected. You, Thomas Goodwin, are the man who steals my hares, snares my pheasants, and, I dare wager, slays my deer. The snow has done me a shrewd turn. I have watched every move of your knavish law-breaking; and, by my troth! you shall suffer for it."

The man, with a gesture of despair, put up his clenched hands entreatingly, and in a strong Sussex dialect made answer in a trembling voice:

"Your honour!—reckon I were tempted. I killed de hare, dis true; but 'twere not meant onhendy. I beant a poacher by natur', as some be. We staarve; de wife be sick and wakely. A man must live. I cannot get work, an' dis bitter weather do try us sorely. I cannot mew [change] my place just now, an' seek work elsewhere; I cannot see my wife an' babe die for lack of victual. What be a man to do?"

"Do!" roared the knight angrily. "Why, take that hare out of the pot, put it in that sack—'twill do to feed my dogs with—and come with me to the

Manor. I'll teach thee, knave, to steal my game from my park under my very nose."

The peasant's aspect changed; his great frame stiffened; his muscles grew rigid; a stony look came into his dull blue eyes.

"I won't part with de food, asking your honour's pardon," he said, "an' that's flat."

Sir Edmund uttered a fierce oath, strode to the hearth, kicked the pot over with his boot, and furiously trampled the pieces of half-cooked flesh into the fire and ashes.

In a sudden impulse of frenzy Goodwin snatched up the long knife from the table; the knight's back was towards him. With all the energy of his huge frame and the frantic hatred of despair and passion he drove the weapon deep between the ribs of his enemy and destroyer. The keen blade shore to the knight's heart, and with a long, choking groan, horrible to hear, he fell dying upon the stone floor. A gasp or two, a convulsive struggle of the limbs and chest, and in a few seconds the knight of the shire, instinct and burning with hot life so recently, lay there as much clay as the walls of the hut around him.

The man and woman looked at one another with eyes in which sickening horror and the birth of a haunting fear struggled for the mastery. The knife dropped from the man's hand; his ashen face fell; the fierce rigour of passion passed from his great frame.

"What—what shall us do?" he gasped.

The woman, pale and trembling as she was, had the readier wit. Her instinct of self-preservation was the stronger.

"Put him under the bed," she said, "till nightfall, and clane that knife."

Goodwin did as he was bid, shuddering at his fell

task, tidied up the cottage, destroyed every trace of the hare, and then opened his door and looked out. The snow was befriending them, that was certain. The air was thick with it, and the mighty flakes, torn and beaten by the fierce hurricane of wind, were massing a fresh covering upon the earth a foot in depth. They watched and waited all that morning and afternoon, whelmed in a fear so horrible that it froze their tongues and turned them into figures of stone. Every blast of the tempest, every rattle of the door, sent a sickening pang of dread to their hearts. Yet, save one, none came near them, and the long, long afternoon at last deepened into night. Once, indeed, a sharp knock came at the door, a head was thrust inside, and a blue-faced forester inquired, "Hath Sir Edmund been seen this way to-day?" Goodwin answered, "Nay," and the man passed hastily on. It was a fearsome moment, but nothing came of it.

That evening Thomas Goodwin, fastening a long coil of rope about his waist, and carrying on his back a ghastly burden, staggered through the forest, and after incredible exertion reached a huge oak tree, deep in the woods, more than a mile away. This oak he had known since boyhood, when, to his vast delight, he had found at the crown of the massive bole a great cavernous hollow. In this hollow—down which he had cut steps to the very base of the tree—when the spreading summer leaves gave him secure shelter, he had loved to hide childish treasures and to imagine for himself a woodland home. None knew of his secret. Hither, in the despair of his manhood, his staggering limbs carried him that winter's night. He reached the tree, fastened a running noose under the armpits of the now stiff corpse, and then, with the free end of his stout rope in his grip, climbed from branch to branch, until he had

reached his resting-place. Then, with the exertion of all his mighty strength, slowly, slowly, he drew the grisly burden up towards him. He had acquired some purchase over a projecting branch, but the struggle was intense. The man's iron sinews stretched and cracked; his wrists and arms and shoulders ached horribly; the sweat, cold as was the night, burst from him; yet the task was achieved, the rope loosened from the heavy corpse, and then the body of Sir Edmund Wing vanished finally from the eye of the world. With a dull, crashing thud it reached the bottom of the hollow tree. All was still. Goodwin fastened up his rope, climbed down again, and then sped home with all the haste that fear, loathing, and superstition could lend to him. The air was still thick with snow; the wind had sunk; but the myriad flakes ceaselessly descending covered up tenderly all traces of that dreadful night's journey, and the man reached his cottage unperceived.

Sir Edmund Wing's murder was never discovered. The countryside was searched, the greatest anxiety prevailed, but the snow and the oak tree effectually baffled every effort of the searchers. It was believed that during that wild tempest the knight had lost his way, and either fallen into the neighbouring river or perished in a snowdrift in some deep bottom or pit. The search was in time abandoned, and the wonder of the knight's disappearance faded presently into a mere memory. More than two hundred years later, when the old oak tree finally rotted to pieces, and some bones were discovered in its recesses, the Wing family had died out, the estate had passed into other hands, and the mystery had been long forgotten.

The shock of that dreadful day and night killed Goodwin's wife, who died and was buried a fortnight

later. The man and his child lived on; their descendants still make their homes within sight of the pleasant South Downs. And it is a curious fact that in that family a hare is looked upon as poisonous or unwholesome food; to this day not a man or woman of the blood will partake of it.

CHAPTER XX

GROUSE-SHOOTING IN THE MAYO MOUNTAINS

Irish and Scotch grouse—Sport over dogs—A superstitious peasantry—The "good people"—A hardy folk—Start for shooting—Sorry mounts—A grand ride—Maxwell's lodge—Mayo red deer—French muskets and extermination—Rough shooting—Pat and the hill foxes—The day's bag—A second morning—Hard climbing and few grouse—Some nice shooting—The drive home.

GROUSE-SHOOTING in the west of Ireland is a very different form of sport from grouse-shooting on Scottish moors. In the first place, the grouse are not so plentiful, the country is much wetter and boggier, and the heather is not nearly so abundant. Walking up grouse among the wild mountains of Mayo and Connemara is extremely hard work, and good condition is, unmistakably, one of the real necessities to the thorough enjoyment of the sport. On the other hand, grouse-shooting in Mayo is always over dogs; the excellent red Irish setters are employed, and for the man who still enjoys this old-fashioned method of shooting—and there are, happily, still many who do—this form of sport is very delightful. Again, grouse in the west of Ireland lie extremely close; even in December you may look to find them lying as well as in August; and with the aid of dogs the gunner may go out, and by dint of hard walking, in some of the wildest and most beautiful scenery in the British Islands, may expect to

have bagged, at the end of an average day's sport, to his own gun, from five to twelve or fifteen brace of grouse, varying with the state of preservation and the nature of the ground over which he is shooting. In Mayo, Galway, and other parts of the west of Ireland, it is usual, as the packs of grouse are often scarce and scattered over a large expanse of mountain, to send out some of the country people in the early hours of the morning to hear the cock birds crowing, and so locate the game and save a good deal of rough and fruitless walking. It is a fact which very well illustrates the benighted and superstitious condition of the west of Ireland peasantry, that here in Mayo you cannot persuade these people to pass a night in the heather, and so save themselves much unnecessary labour in going and coming from and to the lodges. They do not care to venture among the mountains—in fact they will not —until after one o'clock in the morning, because of the "good people," or fairies, whom they believe still to have their haunts among these wild solitudes. They prefer, therefore, to walk out eight or ten miles to the grouse mountains after one o'clock in the early morning, hear the birds calling, and "spot" the packs, and return home to breakfast. They are then ready to accompany the gunners over the same long journey, walk with them during a hard day's shooting, and return again at night, not seldom accomplishing a distance of from thirty-five to forty miles in this way, over extremely rough country, during the twenty-four hours. They are a hardy folk indeed, these west of Ireland peasantry.

We quitted the comfortable lodge at Stramore, in county Mayo, one morning in early September for a day's shooting. It was something like eight miles to our ground, where D., my host, had 16,000 odd Irish

acres of mountain. We were therefore provided with horses, which, as we issued from the lodge, were standing ready for us. These mounts were sorry-looking garrons, hired from small farmers of the neighbourhood at the price of 1*s*. per diem. Rough, unkempt, and sometimes old as they were, they were wonderfully sure-footed beasts, and carried us over the passes, torrents, and mountain-sides in a way that no piece of horseflesh not bred and reared in this wild district could have accomplished. Their saddles and bridles looked as though they would scarcely hang together for the day's journey; however, as we were not likely to get, in the country through which we were to pass, beyond a trot or mild canter, they sufficed. I mounted an old white screw, whose age its owner acknowledged to be not less than nineteen years; and, the rest of the company being ready, we set off along the mountain stream which flows by the doors of Stramore Lodge. Three red setters and a Laverack, all wild with delight at the prospect of a day's sport, accompanied us. And two or three strong Mayo lads, who were to carry the game, had already shouldered our guns and gone on in advance. Pat MacManaman, the keeper, rode with us. Cantering and trotting our sorry hacks along some pieces of grass and heather that spread along the smooth valley of the winding stream, we were not long in getting among the mountains. I have seldom ridden through more magnificent scenery than we passed that clear, bright September morning. Behind us on either flank towered ranges of wild hill country of which Cushcamcarragh and Glennamong, on the one hand, and Mount Eagle, on the other, formed the highest points.

Far to the right, towards distant Lough Conn, towered Nephin, and to our left front Nephin Beg

(Little Nephin), a respectable mountain of 2,065 feet, beyond which rose Slieve Car. Under and upon Nephin Beg the main part of our shooting was to take place to-day. The stream we followed took us—rising ever to higher ground—through a pass in the hills of the wildest and most romantic beauty. It was wonderful how our nags picked their way along the steep sides and amid the rocky boulders of this lovely stream. Every now and again foaming torrents—up which, nevertheless, the salmon and white trout manage to make their way — were below us or alongside. A journey of rather more than an hour at length brought us on to our ground. Here great deep corries and stern, dark, yet magnificent mountains lay around us. In this country the wild red deer of Ireland found a congenial home until some sixty years ago, when the last of them were shot by the country people. W. H. Maxwell, whose delightful book, *Wild Sports of the West*, is well known to sportsmen, lived in a remote lodge upon the coast not far from here, and shot over much of these solitudes. In his time—the first quarter of the nineteenth century—red deer were still moderately abundant, although even then much poached by the peasantry and small farmers of the countryside. A gentleman who knows this district well—shooting with us on the day I write of—informs me that there were plenty of red deer in the Mayo mountains until towards the close of the eighteenth century, when the French landed in Killala Bay, to the north-east of Mayo. These invaders brought with them large numbers of good smooth-bore muskets, with which they armed the Irish peasants. So soon as the French had been disposed of by the British Government, the Mayo peasants turned their attention to the game of the country they inhabited, and, thanks to the excellent

firelocks of their Gallic allies, succeeded in a generation in achieving the complete extermination of the wild red deer of these mountains. As one looks at these magnificent glens, hills, and corries one can easily perceive what a perfect country this must once have been for red deer. Even at the present day it is of so little value to man that it might, without injury to the peasants, be utilised much more profitably as deer forests than for the support of the grouse and the few sheep that now inhabit it.

After spreading out and making a circuit to the right without finding a pack of grouse that should have been hereabouts, we crossed a widish bog and took the side of the lower slopes of Nephin Beg. We were not over-lucky in the early part of the day, but we had managed to achieve three and a half brace of grouse and a hare to our three guns by the time we sat down for half an hour's rest and luncheon at one o'clock.

George O'D., the youngest of the party, who was without a gun, had selected an excellent site by a purling mountain stream, where we sat down and discussed sandwiches, whisky, and tobacco for half an hour. Resuming our way, we climbed a little higher up the mountain, and, as afternoon wore on, sport became a trifle better. A pack of eight grouse, from which I extracted a single bird, went lower down the mountain, and afforded several successful shots to D. and O'D., who were below me. I climbed yet higher with the keeper, Pat MacManaman, and presently came to a wild angle of the mountain, amid the rocks of which the hill foxes made their dens. Pat is, of course, death on these creatures in a country where no legitimate fox-hunter can ever penetrate. He described to me, with infinite zest and spirit, how he occasionally cir-

cumvented these wily robbers, and how, by choosing his time and lying in ambush, he had occasionally the extravagant pleasure of stretching one with his trusty breechloader "shtiff dead," as he expressed it. It was interesting, too, to hear that upon lower ground these foxes are just as much tormented by midges during the hot days of summer and autumn as are human beings.

Resuming our way, we presently topped a high shoulder of Nephin Beg, and then came suddenly on a most magnificent prospect. Far in front of us, out to sea, rose the mountains of Achill Island, Slievemore standing up with special prominence. Blacksod Bay, here and there dotted by a small islet, stretched in front of us blue towards the Atlantic. Turning in the other direction and looking inland, the eye ranged over the flat boglands beyond the mountains to the great waters of Lough Conn, and far beyond, even to the shores of Killala Bay and the Ox mountains of distant Sligo. It was an entrancing prospect turn where one would.

Quitting with regret this magnificent panorama, we descended to a somewhat lower altitude, and presently found ourselves on a dry, heathery neck of the mountains, where Lawn, one of the red setters, was soon feathering about briskly. In a few minutes the dog stood like a rock. I moved forward and a good covey of grouse rose within easy distance. I brought off an easy shot with the first barrel, and missed rather disgracefully with the second. We picked up the dead bird and prepared to move on, but Lawn, nosing about carefully, seemed convinced that another bird remained behind, and, surely enough, once more the staunch setter stood at point. After some little difficulty, for the bird lay like a stone, we finally induced

one more grouse to take wing. It flushed almost from under my feet, and fell an easy victim at twenty yards.

Meanwhile several gun-shots from far down in the valley had informed me that my friends below were also engaged. We followed the pack first flushed back over a rise of the hill, but, finding they had gone on far over the mountain, I reluctantly gave them up. The afternoon was waning, and there was a longish ride home, and we therefore turned our faces for the grassy alluvial spot in the valley where our nags were feeding by the stream-side. Having made a much wider sweep over the mountain, I found that my friends, having finished their shooting, had ridden on. MacManaman and I were not long in mounting our garrons and following them. It was a glorious ride that to the lodge in the soft, mellow, early evening. The westerly hills were throwing long shadows across the valleys as we rode along, and, after twelve miles of climbing and rough walking, the journey homewards, soothed by the refreshing pipe, was a real pleasure, ill-mounted as we were. Pushing the old horses along, and cantering here and there, where a bit of flat gave us opportunity, we presently neared the lodge as the light waned. The two O'D.'s were just in front. D., my host, had cantered on ahead of them, and had just been in time to hand over some grouse and say good-bye to the ladies of the party, who had driven out to bring further supplies to the lodge and catch some trout. Two of them, who had fished, had been pretty successful, having killed between three and four dozen burn trout in a ramble of a mile or two up the stream. These trout were all taken with worm and Stewart tackle.

After comparing notes we found that the total bag for

the day (three guns) footed up to eleven and a half brace of grouse and one hare—a moderate score enough considering the hard walking we had undergone. However, on these Irish mountains grouse are not to be obtained in the numbers of their Scottish congeners, and are often hard to find; and we were fain to be content. The O'D.s presently got on their car and drove home, while D. and I, having indulged in a refreshing bath, dined with excellent appetite, and spent a pleasant evening before a cosy fire of turfs.

Next morning, after a moderately early breakfast, we sallied out for a further assault upon the grouse, this time in a different direction; 16,000 acres of mountain, even if the grouse be somewhat scarce, afford plenty of choice of shooting-ground. I noticed that the lads who had walked with us all yesterday barefoot, carrying the game bags, had this morning put on boots. The better part of a day and night without shoe-leather among these rough hills would, I imagine, suffice, for the time, even the hardest west of Ireland peasant. We walked first out into a broad open valley between the mountains, bearing to the left. Half an hour brought us upon our first grouse, which (thanks to my friend's courtesy) fell to my gun. Failing to find more birds in this direction, we separated, D., taking with him a lad and his Laverack setter, Marquis, bearing higher up the mountain; I, with the keeper and a brace of setters, working the lower slopes. Rose, the bitch of our pair, was no great while in finding a small pack, which got up somewhat wild. However, I secured a single bird, and then, marking another grouse forward, bagged him also. Making a widish sweep, we now bore up a spur of the mountain, where, however, game seemed to-day to be unaccountably scarce. The shepherds had been moving some sheep lately, which, no doubt, had a

good deal to do with the matter. A miss from an odd brace which got up far behind us, upon the summit of a round hill overlooking a small, lonely mountain trout lake, was the only other item of good or ill luck which fell to my lot before joining my companion at lunch. We met by the side of a bog stream, just above the lake, and discussed our sandwiches. Shooting had been poor; it was a still, hot, perspiring sort of a day, without the keen air and delicious breeze of yesterday; and our combined efforts — representing five or six miles of hard climbing and the loss of some tissue—had only produced three brace of grouse between us.

Luncheon over, we took the hill again, and separated, D. going off in a wide curve to the right front, to climb the summit of a stiff mountain, and rejoin me far on the other side. Pat MacManaman and I continued the ascent of the hill we were on, and presently reaching its summit, marched steadily along; Lawn, now working in place of Rose, ranged keenly ahead of us. If anywhere, at this hour of the afternoon, we expected to find two or three packs of grouse among the dry, grassy nooks and hollows upon the brow of this hill. We were not disappointed. Lawn found us a pack within half an hour of getting up from lunch. Eight birds rose, from which I secured an easy first barrel, and then, as the better part of the pack swung downhill to the left, a longish and satisfactory second. Three birds are on to our front, and no great way beyond we light upon them. They get up wildish this time, but I manage to stop one of them with the second barrel. Moving on a few hundred yards, Pat takes the setter a sweep down the side of the hill to recover, if possible, some trace of the bigger half of the pack first flushed. There are some fine horned sheep grazing about the hilltop here, and

I stop to have a look at them, resting on a stone some three or four minutes. As I move forward again to meet Pat and the dog, a fine pack of a dozen grouse get up just in front of me. It is an easy right and left, and two grouse hit the heather. Lawn is close at hand, watching the shot, and the birds are speedily recovered. This pack had been lying closely indeed—within thirty yards of where the sheep were grazing and of my own presence.

Pat's spirits, which had been somewhat depressed at the ill success of the morning, are now rising again. In no great while, thanks to Lawn's care and excellent nose, we light again upon the remains of the first pack fired at. There are five birds, and they scatter widely as they rise. The first bird falls readily enough—a straight shot. But I have to swing round well to the left for the second barrel, and the grouse is all but disappearing behind the angle of the hill before I drop him, a long shot, at more than fifty yards. "The best shootin' in Connaught!" cries Pat enthusiastically, as the right and left thus comes off for the third time. As a very moderate performer with the "scatter-gun," I am inclined to attribute Pat's encomium more to his own success in at length finding grouse than to my own merits. In another five minutes yet another brace are added to the bag. We push on, but our streak of luck has come and fled. The big pack has gone right away, and we are not successful in finding others as we descend.

A long way down the mountain, on the way to the lodge, we pick up D. again. He has had but poor fortune, and has but a brace of grouse and a mountain-hare to add to the bag, which now totals eight and a half brace of grouse and the one hare. Our shooting-day on this occasion is a short one, and we now push on

for Stramore, where, having discussed a welcome whisky and soda, we proceed to bathe, pack up, and then, in the warm evening, we are presently driving dinnerwards through some of the most beautiful and romantic scenery in the west of Ireland.

CHAPTER XXI

THE KESTREL

Gamekeeper's trophies—A gruesome spectacle—Ignorance of keepers—Needless slaughter—Local names—Habits—Differences between male and female—Nesting-places—Familiarity with mankind—Migrations—Wide distribution—Kestrels in South Africa—In other parts of the world—Cuckoos and kestrels—Kestrels easily tamed—Restlessness during migratory period—The kestrel's humble place in falconry.

WANDERING over the pleasant Berkshire downs last autumn, in the neighbourhood of Compton and Ilsley, I came on an old barn, to the side of which was nailed many a trophy of the gamekeeper's prowess. The weather-beaten carcasses of weasels, stoats, carrion-crows, and jays were all there—rightly enough from the game preserver's point of view, for all these creatures are in one way or another dangerous foes to game-birds. But, unhappily, alongside these marauders were nailed also the bodies of eight kestrels, clear proof that the gamekeeper responsible for this grisly array had little knowledge of his business, or of the habits of the slain birds. By this time, one would think, every keeper in Britain ought to know that this beautiful little falcon preys scarcely ever upon game. Its food consists largely of mice, frogs, lizards, beetles, grasshoppers, and other insects and their larvæ, and occasionally, but not very often, small birds. When cockchafers abound kestrels seem to favour them as articles of diet. The quantity of young game-birds—

a kestrel will not attack a full-grown partridge or grouse—taken by these small falcons during the course of the year must be almost infinitesimal. Yet, notwithstanding the warnings, the protests, and the advice that have been proffered on this head, the average keeper still clings grimly to the habit of his forefathers and slays the beautiful and utterly harmless "windhover" whenever he gets a fair chance. Here and there, on an estate where the master takes an intelligent interest in nature and wild life, the keepers may have orders to leave kestrels alone ; but as a rule this handsome little falcon, one of the most characteristic of our British raptorial birds, is ruthlessly destroyed, and nailed shamefully, among malevolent and dangerous vermin, to the barn door.

The kestrel, locally known by various names—windhover, stannelhawk, kastril, stonegall, and creshawk—is one of the most familiar, as it is one of the most interesting features of our rural landscapes. Hovering, head to wind, motionless, or all but motionless, with the merest flicker of its long and powerful wings, over field or down, it may at once be recognised by all but the most unsophisticated or inattentive observers. It cannot be mistaken for any other hawk or falcon by any one in the least acquainted with the familiar birds of our countryside, and the keeper or sportsman bringing it down may rest assured that in destroying it he destroys one of the most harmless of all our British avi-fauna. Every gunner who has a shooting, every landlord, ought to make it a point with his keepers that not a single kestrel shall be shot on his estate.

With its lovely rufous and grey colouring, its elegant shape, worthy of the true falcons, to which it belongs, its fine flight and its bold and independent mien, the windhover ought surely to be allowed to remain un-

From a photograph by Reid.

PLATE XVI.

THE KESTREL'S NEST.

molested, one of the most gallant birds that cleave the air of Britain. The adult male bird, by the way, is to be distinguished from the female by his somewhat inferior size, and by the fact that his tail and the crown of his head are alike of a fine grey colouring, the tail marked with a broadish black bar towards the white tip—while the head and tail of the female are of the same rufous colouring as the back. The hen bird's tail carries dusky transverse bars, with a broader one towards the extremity.

Kestrels nest in various situations; the illustration shows one of their breeding-places, among rocky and precipitous cliffs. The nest consists of sticks loosely put together, and lined with wool, grass, or some other soft substance. Where cliffs and rocks are absent they build with equal readiness in trees, and not seldom may be found refurbishing and inhabiting the deserted nests of crows and magpies. Occasionally, in open or fen country, they may even make their nesting-place on flat, level ground. Hollow trees and ruins are also occasionally made use of. Kestrels seem to me to cherish a peculiar affection for their ancient nesting-places. I can remember, as a lad, in Northamptonshire a kestrel always making her nest in a large oak tree in the centre of a grass field, known as "Apple-tree meadow." And as far as I could learn from the haymakers, who came annually to their work there, a kestrel had always had her abiding-place in that tree for at least a generation back—probably for many generations. These birds usually display very little fear of mankind, and will come boldly over considerable towns. I have repeatedly seen kestrels in and about the quieter parts of Eastbourne, a town of 45,000 inhabitants; once, a year or two back, I saw a female make her stoop into the road near the entrance

to the Devonshire Park, in the very heart of the place.

The kestrel is said to be, and undoubtedly is, largely a summer immigrant; yet it is equally certain that some of these birds are always to be found throughout the winter in many parts of the country. It is, I think, undoubted that the main body of our English kestrels move away east and south to warmer regions towards September. Gamekeepers have often noticed that these birds vanish just about the time that shooting begins. They reappear in February or March. There can be no doubt that the young of those reared in this country, when able to fend for themselves, seek other quarters; and it is pretty certain that many of our British-born specimens wander far over the world and revisit regularly their ancestral rearing-places. The migration of predatory birds is a difficult subject, at present not very much understood, even by our most careful observers. Still it is indubitable that our British kestrel (*Tinnunculus alaudarius*) has a very wide range and is one of the most persistent of cosmopolitans. It is to be found through Asia, as far as China and Japan, over much of Europe, in the Atlantic Islands, and in various parts of upper Africa. It is recorded in the Dark Continent as far south as Fanti in the west and Mombasa in the east. In South Africa it is replaced by a near ally, *Tinnunculus rupicolus*, the lesser South African kestrel, the *Roode Valk* (red-hawk) and *Steen Valk* (rock-hawk) of the Dutch colonists, which bears, in all its habits and its appearance, a striking resemblance to its European cousin. That great hunter and naturalist, the late C. J. Andersson, records in the year 1865 a single example of the true British kestrel, a female of which was shot by him at Otjimbinque, in Damaraland. This is by far the

most southerly point recorded in the African range of this falcon. This example, by the way, is, I believe, still to be seen in the Norwich Museum.

That hawks and falcons do migrate largely is proved by the appearance of myriads of them with the rains in South Africa, and their disappearance with the dry season. During a swarm of white ants in the winged stage, after heavy rain and hot sunshine in Bechuanaland, I have seen hundreds upon hundreds of lesser South African kestrels, western red-footed hobbies, British hobbies (which migrate to South Africa), and other raptorials suddenly appear—whence no man could say—and so long as the swarm lasted prey with the greatest eagerness and greed upon the myriads of fat, yellowish white ants that thronged the atmosphere. It was a truly wonderful sight. Other kestrels—the western grey-winged kestrel and the greater South African kestrel—are found in various parts of southern Africa.

In different parts of the world various other species of kestrel are to be met with. Thus the Pekin kestrel favours India and China. In America is found the so-called "Sparrow-hawk," which is in reality a kestrel (*Tinnunculus sparverius*), and ranges from the shores of the Arctic Sea to Colombia; this bird is replaced further south by a sub-species, and in the Antilles by the Carribbean kestrel. Another American kestrel is *Tinnunculus isabellinus*, which is met with from Georgia to the more northerly parts of South America. In Cuba and San Domingo are found the Dominican kestrel; *Tinnunculus alopex* is found in Africa from Nubia to Bogosland; while the Seychelles, Mauritius, Madagascar, and the Molucca and Sunda Islands all have kestrels of their own. Even Australia and Tasmania can boast a distinct race of this falcon, known to naturalists as *Tinnunculus cenchroides*.

A German naturalist has noted that the common kestrel is in his country often mistaken for the cuckoo; it may be said with equal truth that in England the cuckoo is often mistaken for a hawk. These raptorials are probably more easily tamed than any other species, with perhaps the exception of the dainty merlin. A kestrel may with care and attention be so completely won over, if brought up from the nestling state, that it will sit contentedly on its master's shoulder, without any attempt at confinement, and suffer itself to be carried about freely. It ought, however, to be remembered that these birds exhibit great restlessness at the period of the spring and autumn migration, especially towards September. If, therefore, these captives are suffered to take occasional flights, they should be kept in at such seasons or, impelled by the migratory instinct, they may sail away and never return. The same restlessness has been observed at the period of the spring migration (February), when so many of this race are making north again from their winter sojourn. In captivity they may be fed when young on calves' heart and such tit-bits, cut up very small; as they grow older, on pieces of meat trimmings, dead birds, beetles, mice, and so forth. They should be invariably kept warm and dry.

The kestrel was never reckoned of much use in falconry. Among the hard-and-fast rules laid down by the Normans regulating the use of various raptorial birds in hawking, the gerfalcon was set apart for a king, the falcon gentle for a prince, the peregrine for an earl, the saker for a knight, the lanner for an esquire, the merlin for a lady, and the hobby for a young man. Similarly the goshawk was assigned to the yeoman, the sparrow-hawk to the priest, and the musket to a holy-water clerk. As for the kestrel, it comes last in

a very lengthy list, and is set apart for a knave, which may mean, I take it, no higher personage than a labourer or a serving-man. The kestrel, manifestly, was considered scarcely worth keeping for the high sport of falconry.

Like all his kinsfolk, the kestrel is a very miracle of patience. How many hours of the day does this bird not spend in watching for his prey? Spite of their fierce habits, all the raptorials, from the condor to the tiniest hawk, may be cited as shining examples of this, one of the highest of all the virtues. How often have I watched the kestrel soaring patiently on quivering wing, or sweeping with easy grace from one field to another, watching for his dinner! With him there is no apparent haste or unseemly quarrelling with the destiny that dooms him to search so long, so far, and so widely for his food. The vulture that soars beyond reach of human ken, far up in the clear turquoise of the African sky, must, I am convinced, often go for days without a meal. It is not possible that he should find a dead or dying quarry more than occasionally. Yet day after day these grim birds take their station in the clear realms of space, waiting with infinite, nay, with unexampled patience, for the food they need. The example of all these raptorials is, surely, at once a rebuke and a lesson to man, the most impatient and querulous of all sentient creatures.

CHAPTER XXII

WILLIAM SOMERVILE: THE FATHER OF MODERN HUNTING

John Warde—Somervile as an authority—Temporary eclipse of his fame—Birth, ancestry, and education — Edstone House — The heart of Shakespeare's country—A rare portrait—Somervile's marriage—His hunting establishment and country—His huntsmen—Old hunting days — Literature — *The Chace* — Scarcity of hunting lore — Picture of a hound—Hare-hunting described—The fox—A royal stag-hunt—Flattering portraits—Maids of honour and their woes—Declining years.

JOHN WARDE, who hunted many packs and in many counties, has often been called the "Father of the Chase." That title, it seems to me, belongs much more of right to William Somervile, the Squire of Edstone, who was not only one of the most accomplished and enthusiastic huntsmen that this country has ever seen, but was, in addition, a poet and a scholar, the distinguished author of *The Chace*, a classic which will assuredly live long after fox-hunting has fallen into decadence in these islands. Warde flourished at a later era than Somervile—he was in his prime towards the end of the eighteenth century—and although he undoubtedly had much to do with the organisation and development of fox-hunting as it is now practised, he cannot be said to merit the title bestowed upon him so completely as does Somervile. He reaped where Somervile and Peter Beckford (the author of that other classic of the chase, *Thoughts on Hunting*) had sown;

and it is impossible to deny, by anyone who has carefully perused *The Chace*, first printed in 1735, that, in that fine blank verse poem, Somervile has not only completely described the modern methods of hunting with fox, hare, stag, and otter, but has anticipated in a truly remarkable degree the management of modern kennels, the treatment of hounds, and a score of other details connected with the chase as it is practised at the present day. No modern author, not even Beckford himself, who quotes so largely from *The Chace*, has bettered Somervile's descriptions and advice; and it will be readily conceded by any sportsman of the present year 1904, that the poem is still in its main features as fresh, as masterly, and as accurate an account of hunting, as it is still understood, as it is possible to wish for.

Somervile has, for various reasons, fallen somewhat under the shadow of neglect. It is long since he flourished; his name, except by the faithful few, who treasure the history and the romance of the sport they so greatly enjoy, is but little remembered; and I suppose not five hunting men in a hundred have read his poem, that wonderful account which, in spite of some temporary eclipse of his fame, will always render Somervile immortal. It is difficult for the average reader to glean much information concerning this famous sportsman; his remains were scanty, and his biographers have been fitful and somewhat careless. Some short account of the author of *The Chace* and passages from his poem may therefore be thought worthy of resuscitation.

William Somervile, who was born at Edstone, in Warwickshire, in 1677, and died at the same place in 1742, came of an old county family, having Norman ancestry, at the head of which stood a kinsman of the

poet, Lord Somervile. Educated at Winchester and New College, Oxford, where he seems to have held a fellowship till the year 1704, he succeeded to two estates, that of Edstone, near Wooton Wawen, in Warwickshire, and Somervile-Aston, in Gloucestershire. Of these, Edstone, where, from the year of his quitting Oxford in 1704, he abode till his death, and made his chief hunting quarters, had descended to the family by a marriage with the heiress of the Ailesbury line in the time of Edward IV. Somervile-Aston, from its name, must have been in the family many centuries, probably longer even than had the Warwickshire estate.

It is worth noticing that Edstone House, an old mansion, long since pulled down and replaced by a more modern structure, lay in the very heart of Shakespeare's country; its parish church, Wooton Wawen, where Somervile is buried, is situated between Stratford-on-Avon and Henley-in-Arden, being about six and a half miles from the former and two and a half from the latter place. The great-grandfather of the hunting poet seems to have been well acquainted with Shakespeare, and a portrait of that great Warwickshire worthy was long an heirloom in the family. This portrait was attributed to Nicholas Hilliard, and it would be extremely interesting to know where it has drifted to, if, indeed, it is still in being. In 1820 a steel engraving of Somervile was executed by Worthington from a drawing by J. Thurston. This drawing is stated to have been made "from an original picture in the possession of C. Wren, Esq.," which for more than eighty years remained unknown and undiscoverable by the British public. Two years since (1902) this portrait suddenly appeared in the National Portrait Gallery, London, having been presented by Mrs. Catherine Pigott, the

only surviving granddaughter of Mr. Christopher Wren. Mr. Wren was himself a descendant of a son of the great Sir Christopher, a neighbour of Somervile's in Warwickshire, to whom the portrait had been presented by the author of *The Chace*. It would be a real kindness to have this portrait engraved again; many a sportsman would, I am convinced, be delighted to have a copy of the picture of one who, for all time, has enriched and adorned the chase and its literature.

Once settled at Edstone, Somervile, who married Mary Bethell, a member of the well-known Yorkshire family, devoted himself eagerly to the delights of that sport of which, from his earliest years, he had been a devoted adherent. It is probable that his father before him kept a few couples of hounds: most country gentlemen did in those days, and hunted, often indiscriminately, hare, fox, and occasionally deer. He had excellent kennels, erected by himself, close to his residence, set on a little hill, just as he advises in his poem, sheltered by a plantation from the north and west, and with a pleasant mill-stream flowing at the foot. "He kept," says a writer in the *Sporting Magazine* for February, 1832, "about twelve couple of beagles, bred chiefly between the small Cotswold harrier and the Southern hound; six couple of foxhounds, rather rough and wire-haired; and five couple of otter-hounds, which, in the winter, made an addition to the foxhounds." The writer in the *Sporting Magazine* makes an obvious error in the first part of this statement. It should read that Somervile's *harriers* "were bred chiefly between the small Cotswold *beagle* and the Southern hound." In *The Chace* the poet makes distinct reference to Cotswold beagles and their merits. It would be difficult to breed beagles from the harrier and Southern hound.

Much of the country hunted by Somervile was woodland, the remnants of that great Forest of Arden, with which Shakespeare was so well acquainted. Most parishes in those days were unenclosed, and first-rate wild sport was enjoyed. Some days in winter Somervile hunted hare, a form of chase to which, from his glowing descriptions, he was manifestly passionately attached. His harriers met and threw off usually in the more open parts of the county. Occasionally, it would seem, he visited his Gloucestershire estate and hunted the Cotswolds, following the well-breathed beagles in many a merry hare-hunt in that delightful country. The writer in the *Sporting Magazine*, from whom I have quoted, obtained his information from a sportsman who had himself been entered to hounds by Somervile's old huntsman, John Hoitt. Hoitt lived to the great age of eighty-five, and died in the year 1802, having survived his old master sixty years. From this excellent source, then, we gather that Somervile himself saw to the feeding of his hounds and the management and arrangement of his kennel. "He conducted the chase himself, leaving a man in the kennel to prepare the food, who was in the capacity of earth-stopper. His stud was small, four nags being the greatest number he had in the stable; employing his favourite hunter, Old Ball, three times in the week. Old Ball was a real good English hunter, standing about fifteen hands high, with black legs, short back, high in the shoulders, large barrel, thin head, cropped ears, and a white blaze down his face." This is an account, mainly derived from Hoitt, of Somervile in his later days, when extravagance and a too prodigal hospitality had somewhat straitened his means. It is probable that in the heyday of his career the poet hunted on a somewhat larger scale.

One can imagine the jolly squire sallying forth soon after dawn some three mornings a week in winter—they hunted very early in those days—and making his way with a whipper-in and his ten or twelve couple of hounds to some trysting-place, where a sprinkling of neighbouring landowners, a few hearty yeomen and farmers, and perchance a doctor and parson or two, rode to meet him. One sees him with his fair, fresh face, florid (too florid, one fears) in his later years, long, but straight and well-formed nose, and pleasant, sensitive mouth, clad in hunting-cap, long-waisted coat, leather breeches, and boots fastened over the knee by the excellent, old-fashioned boot-garter, which in the last dozen or so of years has come into vogue again. It would almost seem, from his descriptions, that he hunted with the winding French horn, and not with the short, straight horn, which has long since ousted the old and cumbrous instrument of the chase. This point, however, is not quite clear. It is bad enough to fall upon a straight hunting-horn, but falls sustained while carrying the great curved horn of our forefathers must have broken many a rib. In spring, so soon as he had finished fox and hare-hunting, the poet took up the chase of the otter, and with his big, rough hounds whiled away many a pleasant summer's morning.

Somervile, even in his Oxford days, seems to have been always a bit of a *littérateur*, as well as a keen and bold sportsman. He was, undoubtedly, an excellent classical scholar, and the fact that he translated Voltaire's *Alzira* indicates that he had a taste also for modern languages. He published, among other efforts, an ode "Occasioned by the Duke of Marlborough's embarking for Ostend," in 1712. And he dedicated various poems to Addison, Pope, Thomson (of *The*

Seasons), the Earl of Halifax, and General Stanhope. In 1727 he issued a volume of *Occasional Poems*. None of these efforts, although no doubt they secured to him a measure of consideration among his friends and acquaintances, seem to have contributed at all towards the high popularity afterwards attained by him. In 1735, however, appeared *The Chace: A Poem*. "Its success was immediate," writes Mr. R. Farquharson Sharp, in an interesting memoir of the hunter-poet, prefacing an excellent edition of this poem published in 1896. "A second and third edition appeared in the same year as the first; a fourth and a fifth in 1757; a sixth in 1773, and another, with Bewick's illustrations, in 1796; and during the first half of the present century (the nineteenth)," continues Mr. Sharp, "the poem was frequently reprinted." The first illustrator of *The Chace* was Thomas Bewick; the latest is Mr. Hugh Thomson, whose charming old-world drawings enrich the 1896 edition, so well introduced by Mr. Farquharson Sharp.

It is a somewhat strange circumstance that during the two or three hundred years before Somervile's time no really good and reliable book on hunting had appeared. Here and there, as in the *Gentleman's Recreation*, published by Nicholas Cox in 1677, a certain amount of hunting lore is collected and awkwardly set forth; but much of the information given is antiquated, out of date, and often absurd. Beckford, whose work on hunting, published in 1781, is still, with *The Chace*, a first-rate book of reference, duly acknowledges the vacuum that existed before the Warwickshire squire appeared on the scene. "With regard to books," he says, "Somervile is the only author whom I have found of any use on this subject." Surely no higher testimony could be given than this, furnished by one

who is himself for all time a master of the subject of hounds and hunting. It would be scarcely fair, nay, it would be churlish, to dismiss Somervile without a glance at the work which has rendered him famous. *The Chace* is divided into four books, through which, in the brief space of a page or two of this chapter, we may be allowed to conduct the reader. The poet opens with an address to the Prince of Wales—Frederick the unstable—father of George III. He deals with the origin of hunting, referring to the Normans as the introducers of a regular system and of proper hunting language, and after a notice of the excellence of our horses and hounds, and an address to gentlemen of estates, plunges deeper into his subject. His description of kennel management is first-rate, and little fault can be found with it even by masters and huntsmen of the present day. Here is a picture which may surely interest any man or woman fond of animal life, much more a true hound lover:

"See there with count'nance blithe,
And with a courtly grin, the fawning hound
Salutes thee cow'ring, his wide op'ning nose
Upward he curls, and his large sloe-black eyes
Melt in soft blandishments and humble joy;
His glossy skin, or yellow-pied or blue,
In lights or shades by Nature's pencil drawn,
Reflects the various tints; his ears and legs,
Fleck't here and there, in gay enamell'd pride,
Rival the speckled pard: his rush-grown tail
O'er his broad back bends in an ample arch;
On shoulders clean, upright and firm he stands;
His round cat-foot, straight hams, and widespread thighs,
And his low-drooping chest confess his speed,
His strength, his wind, or on the steepy hill,
Or far extended plain; in ev'ry part
So well proportion'd."

After discussing various breeds of hound, and good and bad scenting days, the first book ends with an

exhortation to his brethren of the chase to glean improvement and seek the intercourse of books.

"Well-bred, polite,
Credit thy calling. See how mean, how low,
The bookless sauntering youth, proud of the skut
That dignifies his cap, his flourish'd belt,
And rusty couples jingling by his side,
Be thou of other mould."

It is to be feared that the exhortation was vain. The country gentlemen of that period, although not so boorish as the squires of Charles II.'s time, so well described by Macaulay, could scarcely be called a well-read or a polished race.

Somervile is credited by tradition with having been more attached to the sport of hare-hunting than any other form of chase. He was, undoubtedly, a keen fox-hunter, but no one who reads the second book of his poem can doubt that he was a devoted harrier man, loving to puzzle out, with patient, well-nosed hounds, every maze and artifice of that most resourceful and cunning of all hunted creatures, the timid hare. He dwells lovingly on every phase of the pursuit, touching, with a master hand, each portion of his subject. First opening with the ways and habits of his quarry, he leads the reader to the advent of the hunting morn.

"Now golden autumn, from her open lap
Her fragrant bounties show'rs; the fields are shorn:
Inwardly smiling, the proud farmer views
The rising pyramids that grace his yard,
And counts his large increase; his barns are stor'd
And groaning staddles bend beneath their load;
All now is free as air, and the gay pack
In the rough bristly stubbles range unblam'd;
No widow's tears o'erflow, no secret curse
Swells in the farmer's breast, which his pale lips
Trembling conceal, by his fierce landlord aw'd:
But courteous now he levels ev'ry fence,
Joins in the common cry, and holloas loud,
Charmed with the rattling thunder of the field."

It is an excellent picture, curious by reason of the fact that Somervile, himself a landlord, has a sly nudge at his class. He paints the joys of a hunting morning, the meet, and the throw off:

"See where they spread
And range around, and dash the glitt'ring dew.
If some staunch hound, with his authentic voice
Avow the recent trail, the jostling tribe
Attend his call, then with one mutual cry
The welcome news confirm, and echoing hills
Repeat the pleasing tale. See how they thread
The brakes, and up yon furrow drive along!"

A hare is found in her form. Without noise or clamour, for in hare-hunting quiet is essential, the huntsman, as the hare is put softly from her seat, brings up his jolly hounds, and lays them on, and away with a burst of music they scour in hot pursuit.

"Now, my brave youths,
Stripp'd for the chase, give all your souls to joy!
See how their coursers, than the mountain roe
More fleet, the verdant carpet skim, thick clouds
Snorting they breathe, their shining hoofs scarce print
The grass unbruis'd; with emulation fir'd
They strain to lead the field, top the barr'd gate,
O'er the deep ditch exulting bound, and brush
The thorny-twining hedge: the riders bend
O'er their arched necks, with steady hands by turns
Indulge their speed, or moderate their rage.
Where are their sorrows, disappointments, wrongs,
Vexations, sickness, cares? All, all are gone,
And with the panting winds lag far behind."

It is a fine picture! Now Somerville directs himself to the minutiæ of the chase and the nature of the hare's tactics.

"Huntsman! her gait observe; if in wide rings
She wheel her mazy way, in the same round
Persisting still, she'll foil her beaten track,
But if she fly, and with the fav'ring wind
Urge her bold course, less intricate thy task:
Push on thy pack."

The chase goes forward. Here is a peep at the hare. How true is the likeness!

> "But hold—I see her from the covert break;
> Sad on yon little eminence she sits;
> Intent she listens with one ear erect,
> Pond'ring and doubtful what new course to take."

Driven by the echoing voices of the hounds behind her, away she flies again, and away thunder hounds and field in pursuit. A check follows. The line is foiled by sheep.

> "Huntsman, take heed: they stop in full career.
> Yon crowding flocks, that at a distance gaze,
> Have haply foil'd the turf. See! that old hound,
> How busily he works, but dares not trust
> His doubtful sense: draw yet a wider ring.
> Hark! now again the chorus fills: as bells
> Sally'd a while at once their peal renew,
> And high in air the tuneful thunder rolls.
> See how they toss with animated rage,
> Recov'ring all they lost."

The chase is now sinking, and the last shifts of the hare are drawn with amazing fidelity. The death ensues, and the final rites are celebrated.

> "All now is joy. With cheeks full blown they wind
> Her solemn dirge, while the loud-op'ning pack
> The concert swell and hills and dales return
> The sadly pleasing sounds."

Like most hare-hunters, Somervile has a soft corner in his heart for the quarry he pursues. Not so for the fox.

> "The conscious villain. See! how he skulks along,
> Sleek at the shepherd's cost, and plump with meals
> Purloin'd."

From hare-hunting Somervile turns for a time to view the pursuit of great game in Hindostan, describing at length and with much vigour Aurungzebe, the Great Mogul, hunting in his far domains. Now follows

the fox-hunt, graphically described from find to kill. After the death, which takes place in a village—

> "The farmer, who beholds his mortal foe
> Stretch'd at his feet, applauds the glorious deed.
> And grateful calls us to a short repast:
> In the full glass the liquid amber smiles,
> Our native product. And his good old mate,
> With choicest viands, heaps the liberal board."

This is but one among a score of pleasing pictures of the English countryside.

After a glance at various sports of the world, the author turns to Windsor to describe a royal stag-hunt. In accordance with the custom of the time—for poets then were all courtiers—he deals somewhat effusively with the various members of George II.'s family. Here pass some of the princesses.

> "Lead on the splendid train. Anna,[1] more bright
> Than summer suns, or as the lightning keen
> With irresistible effulgence arm'd,
> Fires ev'ry heart."

While

> "Amelia, milder than the blushing dawn,
> With sweet, engaging air, but equal pow'r,
> Insensibly subdues and in soft chains
> Her willing captives leads."

There is some truth in this picture. The Princess Amelia was in her youth possessed undoubtedly of much charm and grace. Here follows a portrait—it must be confessed a sadly overdrawn one—of Frederick, Prince of Wales.

> "But who is he,
> Fresh as a rosebud newly-blown, and fair
> As op'ning lilies, on whom ev'ry eye
> With joy and admiration dwells? See! see!
> He reins his docile barb with manly grace.
> Is it Adonis, for the chace array'd?
> Or Britain's second hope?"

[1] The princess Anna became the wife of the Prince of Orange.

Somervile is at once himself again when he plunges into the description, a most spirited one, of a Windsor stag-hunt, with George II. in pursuit. Here are the ladies of the Court in full cry, a pleasing picture.

> "How melts my beating heart, as I behold
> Each lovely nymph, our island's boast and pride,
> Push on the generous steed that strokes along
> O'er rough, o'er smooth, nor heeds the steepy hill,
> Nor falters in th' extended vale below;
> Their garments loosely waving in the wind,
> And all the flush of beauty in their cheeks!"

There seems to have been another point of view, however, even to this scene. Not all the maids of honour were keen horsewomen, and for these hunting had its drawbacks. Says Pope in an amusing letter, written after a meeting with Mrs. Bellenden and Mrs. Lepell, two of the Princess of Wales's ladies—(maids of honour were called "Mrs." then by courtesy)—just in from hunting: "To eat Westphalia ham of a morning, ride over hedges and ditches on borrowed hacks, come home in the heat of the day with a fever, and (what is worse a hundred times) with a red mark on the forehead from an uneasy hat—all this may qualify them to make excellent wives for hunters." Ah, Mr. Pope! insinuating little Mr. Pope! yourself no lover of honest field sports, one sees how you obtained these confidences from the feminine side. "Miss Lepell walked with me three or four hours by moonlight, and we met no creature of any quality but the King, who gave audience to the Vice-Chamberlain all alone under the garden wall."

The blown stag has measured half the forest, and visibly tires. He soils (*i.e.* takes to water), and finally is set up at bay, and then, astonishing to narrate, at the King's command the hounds are called off and the beaten hart is allowed to depart in peace. Somervile

DEATH OF THE STAG.
(From an old print.)

PLATE XVII.

no doubt had warrant for this episode, but one fancies that George II. was not often thus wont to balk his hunt of their hardly earned kill.

From the royal chase Somervile passes to hound breeding, and the walking and entering of the puppies, winding up his fourth and last book with a most spirited and exact account of an otter-hunt. It is manifest that he must have been especially fond of this pastime, as he was of hare-hunting. His descriptions of the amphibious chase are unmatched; there are many beautiful pictures in this part of the poem, and the last scene is thus described:

> "Again he vents;
> Again the crowd attack. That spear has pierced
> His neck: the crimson waves confess the wound.
> Fix'd is the bearded lance, unwelcome guest,
> Where'er he flies: with him it sinks beneath,
> With him it mounts, sure guide to every foe.
> . . . . . .
> . . . Lo! to yon sedgy bank
> He creeps disconsolate: his num'rous foes
> Surround him, hounds and men. Pierc'd thro' and thro',
> On pointed spears they lift him high in air;
> Wriggling he hangs, and grins and bites in vain:
> Bid the loud horns, in gaily-warbling strains,
> Proclaim the felon's fate; he dies, he dies."

Spears, it may be noted, which were used so freely in Somervile's time, have for the last two generations been banished from the sport of otter-hunting, and the quarry is now killed by the hounds alone.

It is a melancholy fact that Somervile, towards the close of his career, fell upon somewhat evil times. He hunted up to the very last year of his life, it is true; but his over-kindness of heart and a too exuberant hospitality led him into extravagances which crippled his estate and embittered his mind. His kinsman Lord Somervile came to his rescue, and a family arrangement was made by which, in consideration of advances

made for the relief of the Squire of Edstone's debts, that nobleman was (Somervile having no children) granted the reversion of the Warwickshire and Gloucestershire estates, subject always to the jointure (amounting to £600 per annum) of the poet's mother, who lived to the great age of ninety-eight.

"Eventually," says Mr. Farquharson Sharp, "he fell a victim to the inducement to obscure the consciousness of his troubles by heavy drinking, 'forced,' as his neighbour and intimate friend, the poet William Shenstone, wrote of him, 'to drink himself into pains of the body to kill pains of the mind.'" Yet, although intemperance undoubtedly shortened his life, as it has shortened the life of many a good man, Somervile seems to have kept going to the very end. "In the last year of his life," it is related in the *Sporting Magazine*, above referred to, "he was entertained at dinner by two hundred fellow-sportsmen in honour of his prowess in the field." He died on the 19th July, 1742, and was buried in Wooton Wawen Church, his own parish. Until the year 1898 no tablet marked his resting-place, but in that year, thanks to the labours of the Rev. F. T. Bramston, the vicar, a memorial, the funds for which were raised by subscription, was erected there. Two of his huntsmen, Jacob Boeter and John Hoitt, lie buried in the churchyard, near their old master. To the last survivor of these, who died, as I have said, in 1802 at a very advanced age, a former vicar of Wooton Wawen composed the following very appropriate lines :—

"Here Hoitt, all his sports and labours past,
Joins his loved master, Somervile, at last;
Together went they echoing fields to try,
Together now in silent dust they lie.
Servant and lord, when once we yield our breath,
Huntsman and poet, are alike to Death;

> Life's motley drama calls for powers, and men
> Of different casts, to fill its changeful scene;
> But all the merit that we justly prize,
> Not in the part, but in the acting lies,
> And as the lyre, so may the huntsman's horn
> Fame's trumpet rival and his name adorn."

These lines had become, in the process of years, almost illegible on Hoitt's tomb; but I believe, owing to the care and exertions of the vicar, they have now been restored.

Looking back into the misty ages of the past, we discern in the stern figure of Duke William of Normandy the first great inspirer of hunting, as, codified, recast, and provided with rules and a seemly language of its own, it became for long centuries understood and practised. We owe, in truth, much to the Normans. Somervile, himself the descendant of Norman stock, and as enthusiastic a sportsman as the Conqueror, gave to his generation the precepts and practise of modern hunting, and has left for all time pictures of the chase which can never be surpassed. He deserves, surely, if any one man is worthy of it, the title of "The Father of Modern Hunting."

CHAPTER XXIII

A SUSSEX SHEEP-WASHING

A pleasant scene—The country in its prime—An ancient custom—The Haven at Pevensey—5,000 sheep washed—Method of washing—Across the stream—The washers—Sheep as swimmers—A typical May day—The marshes—Buttercups in their glory—Two ancient castles—Sheep-shearing—An important function—The feast—*The Winter's Tale*—The clown and his fairing—A pleasing picture—Merry England.

OF all English rural scenes, sheep-washing seems to me one of the most typical and the most pleasant. It takes place at the very fairest season of the year, when the meadows are golden with buttercups and pied with daisies, when the grass is at its greenest, the may-flower lies like snow upon the hawthorn trees, and pink-and-white apple blossoms show in all their loveliness amid the orchards near. Sheep-washing, one of the most ancient of all country customs, is pursued to-day exactly as it has been pursued for hundreds of years past. Trains may come and go, motor-cars may hustle past, but the shepherds conduct their simple operations just as did their forefathers in pre-Reformation—nay, in pre-Norman times. In South Sussex there are various streams and small rivers where this picturesque and most necessary business is carried on amid the pleasantest of surroundings. Perchance it may be that the washing is done in some little marsh-dyke, or stream, set in a very ocean of flat, far-spreading grass meadows.

At Pevensey operations are on a much larger scale. Here a small river, known locally as the Haven, flows under an old stone bridge. Just in front of the bridge is the washing done, the sheep being pushed and poled right across the stream, which measures here perhaps some seventy or eighty feet across. Pevensey Bridge has undoubtedly been a notable sheep-washing place for centuries past. Here must have been cleansed during many and many a pleasant springtime the thick winter fleeces of hundreds of thousands—nay, of millions of sheep. During the brief washing season some 5,000 sheep are annually washed here. They are brought down day after day, a few hundreds at a time, from the neighbouring farms, until the business is ended and the last sheep has had its bath. Usually the work begins in mid-May, shearing operations being undertaken a week or two later. Now and then, when May is an unusually cold month, the sheep-washing takes place somewhat later, lingering on, in fact, until the first days of June.

The operations are very simple, yet very methodical in their nature. On the east or further bank of the stream the sheep are collected in pens. From these they are passed to a little bay, formed by tall poles firmly planted in the bed of the river. After being well dipped, rolled, and turned over in this bay, the unwilling animals—for they do not altogether relish the order of the bath—are passed by the long poles of the washers to the men stationed in mid-stream, who continue the sousing, and send their charges finally out to the western bank, where the sheep emerge breathless, panting, and glad enough to find themselves free from the attentions of the washers and on the good firm land again. Right athwart the stream is erected a narrow temporary platform of single planks.

On this the washers stand armed with long poles, bearing each a blunt, wide prong, one of the irons of which is straight, the other slightly curved. Seven or eight feet in front of these men runs, also right across the stream, a series of long, stout poles, which thus serve to keep the sheep to the avenue in which the washing is conducted. In a broad stream, such as the Pevensey Haven, the sheep gets a thorough wash, and the water is constantly cleansed and replenished by the gentle flow throughout the operations. Sheep are, of course, good natural swimmers, and, once in deep water, they are pretty amenable; in fact, under the long poles of the shepherds they are powerless to help themselves, and they finally submit, after the first ineffectual struggles, with true sheep-like mildness and acceptance of their fate, to the wills of their masters, the pole-bearers. The washing takes place usually from nine o'clock to eleven or twelve. During that time from three hundred to five hundred sheep are cleansed for the shearing. It must be vastly pleasant to the sheep, after the terrors of the wash and the somewhat rough handling of the shearers, to find themselves, a few days later, disencumbered of their thick winter coats, and to emerge into the glorious warmth of the June sun, clad, as it were, in a delightfully cool, yet close-fitting garment of short, clean, white wool.

The last day of May, 1902, was typical of late spring or early summer. There had been heavy rain during the night; the sky was somewhat overcast; the whole countryside was enveloped in a pleasant, steaming warmth, amid which vegetation was springing luxuriantly. Towards eleven o'clock the sun burst forth, the clouds dispersed, and the flat marshes gleamed golden in one vast expanse of buttercups. There has

From a photograph by J. Coster.

PLATE XVIII.

A SUSSEX SHEEP-WASHING.

never been, I think, a more wonderful buttercup year than that of 1902. The verdurous meadows were everywhere arrayed in one marvellous golden glory. Standing on the bridge, one looked down upon the busy workers, and the struggling, choking, half-drowned sheep, as submerged, turned over and over again, they were passed, a steady stream of victims, from one side of the river to the other. Looking up the placid, sluggish stream, one's eye rested upon an ancient, spreading hawthorn tree, white with May-blossom; then, gazing further afield, the pleasant hill of Wartling breaks the horizon. Close by Wartling nestles amid the woodlands the hoary ruin of Herstmonceux Castle. Away to the right the marshes stretch, pied with cattle and sheep, towards Hooe and Little Common. Behind one, a mile away, is the sea, into which the placid little river over which we stand makes its gentle exit upon a flat shore-line. On our left flank, close at hand, is the hamlet of Pevensey, with its ancient church and yet more ancient ruined castle, the latter one of the finest remains of feudal and Roman strength in all Britain. It is a pleasant scene, indeed, on this goodly morning, and, the sheep-wash over, we turn with some reluctance to our cycles and hie us homeward.

Sheep-shearing, which quickly follows the washing process, used to be, and still is, a much more cheery and important, though scarcely a more picturesque business than its watery forerunner. Many of the quaint old forms and customs have departed from this high function, yet the time of shearing is still looked forward to with a good deal of pleasure and anticipation by both master and men. I can well remember as a youngster the enormous rounds of boiled beef which used to be prepared for the shearers in

Northamptonshire at that period—the early seventies —the gallons of home-brewed ale that were drunk, the general cheerfulness of the whole business. And the way those mountains of boiled beef and acres of pudding and hills of cheese and bread used to disappear was something to behold and to remember. But then the task was hard, and the labourer was worthy of his reward. Sheep-shearing is tough work. More than once, for the fun of the thing and the acquiring of useful knowledge, I have shorn sheep myself during a long day or two, and I can testify to that fact, as well as to the fact that it is an operation that needs apprenticeship and practice. To the novice it is a backaching task, indeed, and the end of the first day's labour means much stiffness, and hands, arms, and clothing imbued with the strong-scented, natural grease of the animal shorn. However, the trick of it once mastered, shearing is an art that will not soon be forgotten, and I fancy, even now—and it is many years since I handled a sheep—I could open out the fleece and strip it away neatly from its mild possessor without much difficulty. Like skating and swimming, this art, once acquired, comes pretty readily again to him that formerly practised it.

Shearing has, of course, lost a good deal of the high revel, festivity, and frolic of Shakespeare's time. Shakespeare himself never displayed his marvellous acquaintance with every phase of English life more happily than in his portrait of the shearers and their merrymaking in *The Winter's Tale*. A clown enters to the crafty Autolycus, and begins to reckon up the cost of his fairing. "Let me see," he mumbles to himself in his slow way, "every 'leven wether—tods; every tod yields—pound and odd shilling: fifteen hundred shorn,—what comes the wool to?"

Autolycus whispers to himself, aside, "If the springe hold, the cock's mine."

The clown continues, "I cannot do't without counters. —Let me see; what am I to buy for our sheep-shearing feast? '*Three pound of sugar; five pound of currants; rice*'—What will this sister of mine do with rice? But my father hath made her mistress of the feast, and she lays it on. She hath made me four-and-twenty nosegays for the shearers,—three-man songmen all, and very good ones; but they are most of them means and bases; but one Puritan amongst them, and he sings psalms to hornpipes. I must have *saffron*, to colour the warden pies; *mace, dates,*—none; that's out of my note; '*nutmegs seven; a race or two of ginger,*'—but that I may beg; '*four pound of prunes, and as many of raisins o' the sun.*'"

A pleasing picture, truly, culled from Shakespeare's intimate knowledge of Warwickshire village life. Somehow England was merrier in those days. Pleasures were simple and far between; yet how folk enjoyed them! And this only a hundred years after the Wars of the Roses, when the country had been torn, ransacked, and drenched with blood from one end of the realm to the other.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHITE-TROUTING IN CONNEMARA

Galway Bay and its beauties—A pleasant drive—The river—*Osmunda regalis*—A big fish—A catastrophe—Fair sport—Bogland stream—Wild country—"Making Connemara poor"—Further sport—Kenealy's cabin—A white-trout lake—Trying the river—Poor fishing Across the moor—A good fish—Some brilliant sport—The bag—Homeward bound—Sea-trout as table fish—The gourmet's loss.

THE drive alone, on a fresh, gleamy, soft Irish morning, along the northern shores of Galway Bay, was, as we passed it time after time on our fishing and shooting excursions towards some lovely lake, picturesque river, or wild grouse mountain, worth travelling from England for. One never tired of it. We quitted the house pretty early one morning, mounted the car, and trotted briskly off. Galway Bay, stretching to the Arran Islands and thence beyond to the wide Atlantic, looked, as usual, immeasurably lovely. Cloud and sunshine in their tender dalliance combined to cast the most exquisite colouring upon the broad arm of sea-water. Here were to be seen, under the shifting lights and shades, within the space of half a minute, turquoise-blues, violets, sea-greens, and tender browns scattered in patches, streaks, and ribbons of colour, and giving a perfectly wonderful effect.

Seven miles over a fair road on the swift travelling-car landed us on the banks of the river we sought. Here we alighted, walked a little way upstream, and then put together our rods. It was a trifle early for the

white trout; but we knew these game fish were already running, and brown trout might always be relied upon to help out the making of a decent basket. The river was of no great size, perhaps twenty-five or thirty yards across at its widest stretches. Near the sea it fell gently through a rocky valley, well bushed in parts, with a belt of copse and small timber to get through before the falls were reached. On its banks the *Osmunda regalis* grew in a profusion that I never saw excelled elsewhere.

There was a moderate breeze from the north-west, which served me for casting somewhat better than my friend on the opposite bank. After taking two or three decent brown trout, I was met in a smooth flat part of the stream, just below what is known to the natives as the "poteen" pool, with that boiling rise of a sea-trout which the angler can never mistake. The rise was a true one, and the fish firmly hooked, and in two or three minutes a brilliant three-quarter-pound white trout, not long from the sea, was in the landing-net. A little further on, after I had taken another brown trout or two, a far heavier fish of more than four pounds' weight had risen, been hooked, and was fighting, as only a strong grilse can fight, for his life. Five minutes of hard tussling, and the fish was beaten. I drew him towards the bank, where Peter, who carried a gaff, on the chance of a salmon-peal[1] being hooked, was ready. But Peter, unhappily, was not an expert with his instrument. Two wild lunges through the thick *Osmunda* fern, here covering the margin of the stream, resulted in the breaking of the end of my cast, and the escape of the peal, which, with a good fly and a foot or so of gut sticking in his upper jaw, sailed away for safer depths. An English expletive from myself, and some strange Erse oaths

[1] Grilse are always known as peal in the west of Ireland.

from my attendant, followed this shocking misfortune. Poor Peter was full of apologies and distress; the mischief was done, it was no use crying over spilt milk, and so, inwardly grieving over the loss of the first grilse hooked that season, I resumed my progress upstream.

Striking through the belt of woodland on my left, we emerged, after a short but rough ascent, on the upper part of the stream. A little way further on I was rejoined by my fishing companion, who had killed four nice white trout, risen a salmon, and captured a few "brownies."

The course of the stream now lay through a long stretch of flat grass and bog-land. We therefore got into a rough boat, and were pulled steadily along a piece of stream which flowed quietly, somewhat like a canal, through the smooth terrain. Beyond us the country rose gradually, until checked by the wild, rough moorland hills which towered upon the skyline. As we were rowed we cast our flies on either side of the boat, with the result that I took a nice white trout of a pound and both my comrade and myself several good brown trout. The wind was steadily freshening, and as we emerged presently upon a sort of lake into which the stream widened, our boatman had quite as much as he could manage to keep his unwieldy, ill-found coble moving.

At length, after a row of two or three miles, we were put ashore again below a small fall, beyond which the boat could ply no further. Below these falls my fishing friend hoped to get a salmon, but after trying every pool with various lures, he had to resume his march with the addition only to his creel of another good white trout of about two pounds. Meanwhile, I had steadily fished upstream, and although sport was not brilliant,

I succeeded in picking up eight or nine nice brown trout, as well as a game white trout of a trifle over a pound and a half before meeting for lunch. This sea-trout rose like a lion, and gave quite a pleasant little fight before I had him gleaming like a piece of silver in my landing-net.

Once again having met my comrade, we sat upon a dry bank, discussed our sandwiches and whisky-and-water, and smoked a pipe before going further. We were now in a piece of wild, rough country, partly moorland, partly rank bog, through which the river flowed on its way from the upland lake from which it took its source. Not a beast, or a human being, or even a hut or cabin was to be seen. True we had passed in our ramble the remains of an illicit still, now deserted and unused. But this season there had come into the district a new and particularly active inspector of police, and the poteen makers and their clients, who prefer their liquor without paying duty for it, had been having a bad time of it. "Sure, your honour!" said one of the country people to my friend, referring to the inspector, "Mr. —— is making Connemara poor!" We could not help roaring with laughter at this simple confession.

After lunch we left the river and tramped across a terribly wet piece of bog to a small lake, where the brown trout often rise very freely. But upon this afternoon the fish were not in the vein. Possibly the wind was getting a trifle too much into the north for them. At all events, the "brownies" were not to be coaxed, and after trying for nearly an hour and only picking up a few small creatures, we quitted the inhospitable lake and splashed back over the mile or so of bog to the river again. Towards three o'clock we met the boatman who had rowed us up in the morning, and pro-

ceeded downstream. We took a couple of nice brown trout trailing across the open water, and then, on being put ashore again, separated and fished downstream. The rise had quite gone off, and we did little more good that day. Just below the big falls, in some deep pools of considerable size, the peal were jumping vigorously. But neither my companion nor I, do what we would, could tempt a fish. Tiring of the sport, I put up my rod, and went off to the cabin of my gillie, Peter Kenealy—they seem to be all Kenealys and Costellos along the coast here—to change my boots and stockings, wet through after the bogland tramp, and look out for the car. The cabin was a typical Connemara dwelling. It was built of stones and mud, roughly thatched, and floored with earth. The pig had its bed of straw, neatly disposed in a little square by the wall. Fowls were everywhere. The blue smoke from the fire of turfs escaped through a hole in the roof. Close to the fire crouched an aged and withered woman, the mother of my gillie, crooning over an infant grandchild. Mrs. Kenealy herself, a good-looking, well-complexioned young woman, with a pair of pleasant grey Irish eyes, was busy—barefooted, of course—over her household affairs. I had a pinch of tea with me in a piece of paper, and while I changed my boots, Mrs. Kenealy was good enough to brew me a pot of the hot, comforting beverage. That five-o'clock tea in the Connemara cabin was particularly welcome after the wet walk and a somewhat cold afternoon. These people had little English and I no Erse, so that our exchange of ideas was unfortunately very limited. But no hosts could be more courteous or more kindly than these poor Galway peasants in their humble cabin. Presently the car drove up, I paid Kenealy his fishing fee, said good-bye, drove off, picked up my comrade at a bend of the

river—he had, unfortunately, had no further sport—and we were speedily rattling dinnerwards.

My pleasantest recollections of white-trouting on the wild yet supremely beautiful Connemara coastline lie, however, always with a small lake, resting below the foot hills of the mountains, and connected with the sea by a series of sparkling falls, which led to the rocky shores of Galway Bay. This small river, and notably the beautiful lakelet through which it ran, were especially beloved of sea-trout, and particularly in the month of August, when these fish were running up from the sea in large numbers, very excellent sport was to be got with them.

A long but always enjoyable drive of ten or eleven miles took us one morning to the lonely piece of coast-line, where the stream we sought poured its waters into the blue bay. Getting out our lunch and fishing tackle, and sending back the car to a village some miles away till evening, we were quickly equipped for the fray. Crossing the little stone bridge that spanned the stream some hundred and fifty yards from the shore, we descended the litter of rocks and tried for a while at a biggish pool, where the salmon were accustomed to rest on their first entrance from the sea. However, to-day no peal were to be raised, and even the white trout seemed to be few and far between. One only, a nice fish of 1¾ lbs., was taken by my comrade, after a brilliant little struggle, and safely deposited in the creel. Now we turned inland and fished for an hour or so up the left bank of the stream. The sun was brilliant, the water too clear, and at this time there was but little breeze. It was not surprising, therefore, that fortune was not favourable to our efforts, and, save for a few incautious brown trout taken from some eddy or small waterfall, we had little sport. For the present we

could do nothing with the sporting fish of which we were in search. Still the genial parish priest, a real sportsman, whom we had passed on our way thither, had told us that the white trout were surely running, and that he himself had made a capital bag on the little lough above a day or two before.

Quitting the river, we now set forth by a short cut, a mere bog-path, for the lake. We were guided by a country lad, who was to row for us, and who slipped along barefooted at a slinging pace towards our destination. Half an hour's march brought us to the edge of the water, a gem-like lake enclosed in a wild setting of typical Connemara scenery. Mountains, moors, bogs, and, towards the sea, scant grazing land, littered with the true Galway huddle of stones, stretched far and wide around us on every hand. Close to the lake was a tiny lodge, now deserted, where, however, we were able to obtain the necessary boat. Before embarking we lunched, and while lunching my companion made a cast or two from the bank. The breeze had been rising steadily for the last hour, and the lake was now well rippled by brisk wavelets. At the second cast there was a magnificent rise, and D. was fast in a sturdy sea-trout, which, after a frantic leap or two, gave him an excellent time of several minutes. At length the plucky fish was conquered and safe in the landing-net, a magnificent white trout of two and a half pounds, fresh from the salt water and with the sea-lice still showing on his silvery and most shapely form.

Fired by this cheerful omen, we quickly dispatched our lunch, bestowed ourselves in the boat, and began casting. For the next two hours we had as good and lively a piece of fishing as I ever remember in the west of Ireland. The lake was full of sea-trout,

many of them in the exact humour and rising freely, if at times somewhat short. The breeze, a full westerly one, soft and balmy from the far Atlantic, held fair; white clouds sailed frequently across the sky, temporarily obscuring the sunblaze; all the conditions were as favourable as one could wish for. Sitting at either end of the boat, we were pulled gently about the lake, casting steadily, and cheered by many an exciting struggle with some of the boldest and liveliest white trout that a man could hope to encounter. If we had killed all the fish we rose, or even hooked, that day, we should have had a great, almost a phenomenal bag. As it was we missed some, lost others, and were twice broken by heavy and strong fighting fish. None the less we had a most delightful afternoon's sport, landing at four o'clock with two dozen and one white trout, the smallest three-quarters of a pound, the biggest, killed by my friend D., a most accomplished fisherman, scaling a mere fraction under three pounds. In addition to these fish, all of them in magnificent condition, our creels contained a number of brown trout, captured at intervals between the rises and battles of their silvery and far more vigorous cousins.

For the last hour the rise had been steadily going off, and the main portion of our capture was accomplished in an hour and a half. A walk over the moorland path brought us, towards five-thirty, to the river bridge, where the car and the ever-faithful Pat—a very miracle of Irish punctuality—were awaiting us. Then followed a most pleasant drive, lightened by tobacco and cheery converse, through the mellow Connemara evening. That night at dinner some of the pick of the white trout—surely the most delicious of all the *Salmonidæ*—graced our repast. They were

in superb condition, and their freshness added yet a finer flavour to their perfection. Sea-trout a day or two old, or kept for some days upon ice, as those must be that are bought in London shops, are not for a moment comparable with a fish fresh run from the sea and cooked the very evening of the afternoon on which it was killed. In this respect the town-abiding gourmet, who knows not the joys of sport and labour, is at a huge disadvantage. He, poor soul, can never know the real, the superb excellence of this, the most delicate and well-tasted fish in the world. Well! he toils not, neither does he spin—or shall we say cast? Surely he is undeserving of a delicacy that can be tasted only in perfection near to its native waters.

CHAPTER XXV

BADGERS AND THEIR WAYS

Lord Middleton's Hounds—Great slaughter of badgers—Foxes and badgers—Beckford on entering young hounds—Nicholas Cox on the badger—Badger-baiting—Hunting with hounds—The badger and his relations—The ratel—Weight of badgers—Habits—Diet—Winter repose—A mighty digger—Number of young—Curious instance of affection—Tame badgers—Clever traits—Mr. Lort and his badger "Sally."

AT the annual dinner of Lord Middleton's Hounds, held at Malton, in Yorkshire, in May, 1903, Will Grant, the retiring huntsman, made an extraordinary statement. He told his hearers that during the fifteen years in which he had hunted the pack he and his hounds had killed 2,000 foxes, a highly satisfactory record. But he added further that during his last three seasons he or his pack had killed, into the bargain, no fewer than 161 badgers. Badgers are, evidently, plentiful enough in Yorkshire, and these animals are by no means beloved of fox-hunting folk; yet it passes the wit of the average sportsman and lover of wild life to understand why, in three seasons, Lord Middleton's huntsman should have destroyed this huge number of a beast which has not only become comparatively rare in Britain, but which is, after all, one of the most harmless as it is one of the most interesting of our native fauna.[1]

[1] Since this chapter was written I have heard from Lord Middleton and his late huntsman, Will Grant, in reply to inquiries of mine on this subject. Lord Middleton tells me that his country is overrun with

Huntsmen have usually a strong prejudice against badgers, claiming that not only do they at times dispossess the fox of its earth, but that they will, on occasion, even destroy young cubs. These charges are based upon very slender evidence. Now and again it may have chanced that a badger has turned a fox out of an earth; but it is pretty certain, on the other hand, that the fox displays exactly the same tactics, and takes to himself the home and abiding-place of some badger and his mate. Occasionally it has happened, where the earths are large, that both fox and badger have been found occupying the same fastnesses. The badger, notwithstanding the fact that it has a strong smell of its own, set up by a white substance exuded from a gland, is a beast of extremely cleanly habits, and it is said that the fox occasionally drives it from its earth by rendering that ordinarily well-kept apartment uninhabitable—at all events by a badger.

Some years ago, in a place where a pair of foxes and a pair of badgers dwelt in the same covert-side, the vixen produced a family; one morning one or two of the cubs were found outside the earth, dead. It was stated that in each case the skull of the infant fox had been bitten through, and the badgers were instantly accused of being the murderers. There was no direct evidence upon the point, and a Scottish jury would probably have found the accusation "non-proven." One of the badgers may have committed the crime; but on the other hand it may not. Some wandering dog

badgers, and that these animals have greatly increased during the last quarter of a century. He adds that they are mischievous and do harm in many ways. Even from the point of view of the fox-hunter, however, this extirpation of badgers seems to me a trifle unreasonable. Grant informs me that he has killed as many as four badgers in one day, with hounds, and has dug out as many as eight (old and young) from one earth. He conducts his digging operations in the summer time.

may not impossibly have done the mischief. Anyhow, the stigma has remained, rightly or wrongly, with the badgers, and the case is often cited, to the infamy of a very harmless and inoffensive race of animals, by fox-hunters and their adherents.

Fox-hunters, in addition to their ancient and inborn suspicion of the badger, have for ages been accustomed to enter their young hounds to this quarry. Beckford, in his instructions upon the education of the young entry, writes as follows: "I know an old sportsman who enters his young hounds first at a cat, which he drags along the ground for a mile or two, at the end of which he turns out a badger, first taking care to break his teeth; he takes out about two couple of old hounds along with the young ones, to hold them in. He never enters his young hounds but at vermin, for he says, 'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.'"

A sporting writer of Charles II.'s time—Nicholas Cox—has somewhat to say upon the same topic. "If she" (the badger) "be hunted abroad with Hounds, she biteth them most grievously whenever she lays holds on them. For the prevention thereof, the careful huntsmen put great broad collars made of *Grays*' (badgers') skins about their Dogs' Necks. Her manner is to fight on her Back, using thereby both her Teeth and her Nails, and by blowing up her Skin after a strange and wonderful manner she defendeth herself against any blow and Teeth of Dogs; only a small stroke on her Nose will despatch her presently; you may thrash your heart weary on her Back, which she values as a matter of nothing."[1]

Poor badger! for centuries he has been one of the

[1] As a matter of fact, the most vital part of the badger's anatomy is at the back of the head. A blow there will easily kill this animal.

most persecuted of all beasts in Britain. In baiting with young dogs some of the vilest cruelties were formerly perpetrated upon him. For instance, the lower jaw of the poor brute was occasionally sawn off, so that the unfortunate beast should be rendered harmless when fastened up in a barrel and there attacked by his oppressors. The very term to "badger" shows but too plainly the infamous treatment that this most inoffensive and luckless animal has been accustomed to receive from countless generations of brutal folk. It is something to our credit that we have put down such cruel pastimes as bull-baiting, cock-fighting, badger-baiting, and the like; yet it is clear that the badger, although he lives in somewhat happier times than formerly, has still a good many foes. It is surely no achievement by any pack of hounds that they should have destroyed 161 of these peaceful animals in the space of three seasons! There is no great harm in killing a badger with fox-hounds when found in the open, an incident that not infrequently happens (a year or two since the Pytchley killed two in one morning); but 161 of these beasts slain in three seasons by a single hunt—it is a slaughter scarcely to be justified even by the master and huntsman of a badger-infested country!

A season or two back a pack of hounds, the Axe Vale, were got together in the West of England to hunt badgers by night. Ten and a half couples were used, and very good sport was shown. At first moonlight nights were chosen, but it was found that hounds ran just as keenly in black darkness as by the light of the moon. On these occasions the master and whippers-in wore belts and carried policemen's lanterns. This may be classed as legitimate sport; and in a wild country, where badgers are plentiful, there can be little

harm done in keeping the animals down in this way. There are, however, few parts of England where badgers are ever sufficiently numerous to warrant the pursuit of them in this manner. The Axe Vale, by the way, during a fortnight's hunting in the spring of 1902, killed seven old badgers and ran other two to ground, so that their country must have been well stocked with these animals. Country people and dog fanciers have rather a senseless predilection for digging out badgers and killing them. This is, probably, a relic of the barbarous "badgering" craze of our rude ancestors. There is little of sport or pleasure in the business. The badger is much worried, but seldom killed fairly by the dogs employed. He is usually slain by a blow with a heavy bludgeon, and his remains go to decorate —or otherwise—the bar-parlour of a publican, or perhaps the shop of some sporting hairdresser. Surely our British badger deserves a better fate than this. Why not leave him alone—he harms no man—and let him inhabit his quiet countryside in peace?

Badgers belong to the great weasel tribe (*Mustelidæ*), and are not at all closely allied, as some people seem to suppose, to the bears. Among their more or less distinguished relatives may be named the wolverene, the otters, skunks, ratels, martens, polecats, and weasels. Various races are found in different parts of the world, including the sand-badgers of the East, natives of India, the Malay Peninsula, Java, Sumatra, and Borneo. The true badgers (*Meles*) are found in Europe, Asia, northward of the Himalayas, Persia, and Japan. In Africa and India are to be met with the curious ratels, a remarkable branch of the family, distinguished by their extraordinary fondness for honey. To obtain this luxury they spend most of their time, when not in their earths, in hunting for

the nests of wild bees. Having discovered these, they proceed to rifle the combs. They are absolutely oblivious—as are our English badgers—of the stings of the infuriated bees, their tough, thick, and loose coats protecting them from any serious injury. No doubt, too, after thousands of years of honey-plundering, they are practically immune to the attacks of their victims. Ratels are strong and very courageous beasts. The Boers of South Africa hold them in high respect—as do the natives—and assert that a pair of these beasts will occasionally attack a human being. I have heard of men being treed by these animals, but whether the tale was true or false I am uncertain. What is certain is that the ratel, or honey badger, of South Africa is a beast extremely difficult to kill, by reason of his tough constitution, good defensive powers, and extraordinarily loose coat, and that he is, when meddled with or put out, a beast of very high courage and unpleasant manners.

Our English badger, known of old by such various names as Brock, Gray, Boreson, and Bauson, measures, in a good specimen, as much as two feet six inches in length. He will weigh certainly up to thirty-five pounds, possibly more, in exceptional instances. Pennant, the well-known naturalist of the eighteenth century, had a tame badger (a male) which weighed thirty-four pounds. In November, 1902, Mr. Arthur Heinemann, master of the Cheriton Otter Hounds, unearthed a pair of badgers near Exford, in North Devon, which weighed respectively thirty-three pounds (the boar) and thirty-four pounds (the sow.) There is absolutely no good reason for supposing that even these weights are not sometimes exceeded.

As a rule the badger makes its home in a snug and deep earth, often having several chambers. In this

earth, having made a comfortable bed of grass, hay, and leaves, it passes the whole day, mostly sleeping away its time. Occasionally, however, this animal will rear her young above ground. During the spring of last year (1903), while cutting a thick gorse covert in Staffordshire, the people at work came on a litter of five young badgers lying in a shallow nest, with no other protection than the natural seclusion of the covert. The badger's habits are essentially nocturnal, as well as very shy and secretive, and not until after evening has fallen does it stir abroad. At night it is very active and very wideawake, rambling for long distances in search of food and for exercise. It is an omnivorous eater, and when sharp-set will no doubt devour almost anything. But chiefly it preys on slugs, worms (of which it is very fond), beetles, moles, and various roots, bulbs, herbs, fruits, and vegetables. It is partial to the bulbs of the wild hyacinth, and roots up many a plant. It is, too, extremely fond of wild strawberries, and anyone possessing a tame badger and a good strawberry bed will do well to see that his pet is not allowed the free run of the garden while this fruit is about. The badger is also a great epicure in eggs, and much of the hostility of game-keepers to this animal lies undoubtedly in the fact that it will, when it gets the chance, devour a whole nest of partridge or pheasant eggs. Badgers are said also to be fond of honey; and, knowing the extraordinary craving of their South African cousin, the ratel, for this delicacy, I should say it is not improbable that they may occasionally partake of it. It is certain that these animals have a particular liking for the nest and larvæ of wasps and wild bees, digging down with strong feet and infinite perseverance till they attain their object. In the captive state a young

badger was brought up on a diet, first of the milk of a retriever bitch, by which it was foster-mothered, afterwards of eggs and milk, then of fish and meat. It approved of bread and potatoes, when crumbled up and mixed with milk. It would occasionally eat shot birds, and once, getting into a hen-house, killed five chickens. These animals are said by keepers to kill and devour freely young rabbits: that they do partake of this fare at times is, I think, certain; but that they destroy any very considerable number of rabbits in the course of the year is more than doubtful. Still, the badger is carnivorous in his tastes, and is not, even by his kindliest friends, to be absolved from devouring at times tender rabbits, and even the young of game-birds when he can get hold of them.

In hard winter weather the badger lies much in its earth, hibernating for long periods much after the fashion of the bear, and sleeping, like that animal, with one paw in its mouth. At this season the beast closes up the mouth of its den, and slumbers away its time for many days, even weeks together. In milder weather it ventures forth again in search of food. Snow it detests, and its footprints are very rarely to be noticed among those of other creatures, furred and feathered, when the land lies sheeted in a garment of spotless white. These animals are good swimmers; and a tame badger, thrown into the water, will strike out and make its way to land aptly and well. But apparently they do not take readily to water on their own account and in the wild state. In the business of digging, the badger is one of the finest exponents in the world, making its way underground, even amid the greatest obstacles, with a strength, celerity, and perseverance that are truly marvellous. I have always regarded the *aardvark*, the ant-eater of South Africa,

as the champion digger of the animal kingdom, having been witness of some of his exploits; but the badger takes a very high place in the art of getting under ground. A captive badger, unless very carefully looked after, will make its escape from what seem impossible situations. The sportsman-naturalist St. John one day found a badger in a trap, not much injured. Tying a rope to its hind leg, he drove the animal home, strange to say, the captive beast jogging steadily along in front of him, and giving little more trouble than a pig going to market. On reaching home the animal was put for the night into a paved court, where it seemed perfectly secure. "Next morning," says St. John, "he was gone, having displaced a stone that I thought him quite incapable of moving, and then, digging under the wall, he got away."

The badger will not only locate with extraordinary acumen, but will dig up with immense quickness, moles in their earths. It is probable that the animal obtains some fair proportion of his flesh diet from this source; he has, however, many little plans for achieving the luxuries that he fancies at various seasons: he will, for example, make his way to a rookery in springtime and pick up and devour young rooks that have fallen, as they often will do, out of the nest. Once having fixed upon the site of its earth, the badger excavates with astonishing rapidity. In this operation it does not, however, have recourse to the plan vouched for by our friend Nicholas Cox, author of the *Gentleman's Recreation,* who, writing in 1677, makes the following extraordinary statement: "*Badgers,* when they earth, after by digging they have entered a good depth, for the clearing of the Earth out, one of them falleth on the Back and the other layeth Earth on the Belly, and so taking his

hinder feet in his Mouth, draweth the Belly-laden *badger* out of the Hole or Cave, and having disburdened herself, re-enters and does the like till all be finished." Truly our ancestors had some marvellous ideas on the subject of natural history!

At birth the mother badger produces from three to five young, which are born blind. These animals are credited with having a very faithful affection for one another, which, knowing the very close attachment that a tame badger will form for the person whom it looks upon as its master, one can very easily credit. Buffon relates the following anecdote: "Two persons were on a short journey, and, passing through a hollow way, a dog which was with them started a badger, which he attacked and pursued, till he took shelter in a burrow under a tree. With some pains they hunted him out, and killed him. Being a very few miles from a village called Chapelatière, they agreed to drag him there, as the Commune gave a reward for every one which was destroyed: besides they purposed selling the skin. Not having a rope, they twisted some twigs and drew him along the road, by turns. They had not proceeded far when they heard a cry of an animal in seeming distress, and stopping to see from whence it proceeded, another badger approached them slowly; they at first threw stones at it, notwithstanding which it drew near, came up to the dead animal, began to lick it, and continue its mournful cry. The men, surprised at this, desisted from offering any further injury to it, and again drew the dead one along as before, when the living badger, determined not to quit its dead companion, lay down on it, taking it gently by one ear, and in that manner was drawn into the midst of the village: nor could dogs, boys, or men induce it to quit its situation by any means; and, to their shame be it said, they had

the inhumanity to kill it, and afterwards to burn it, declaring that it could be no other than a witch." Whether this narrative is fable or fact it is hard to say: there seem to be elements of possibility about it, knowing the curiously dogged nature of the badger and its great capability of affection.

Badgers in captivity are not often seen; yet, when taken quite young and reared, they become very interesting pets. I once knew a tame badger which was, in its way, one of the most interesting and amusing beasts I ever met with. It had been brought up from infancy with a tabby kitten, and the two, as they grew older, developed a warm friendship. Their evening gambols were most amusing, the cat with her sprightly and active ways, and the badger with his quaint gait and ludicrous, old-fashioned manners forming the oddest contrast. The badger, however, is a far quicker and livelier beast when it is excited or interested than most people would suppose. One of the greatest treats to this animal was a small pot of earthworms, and a ramble over the lawn on a dewy summer's evening, when the big lob-worms were abroad, was always keenly appreciated. This badger had an extraordinary attachment to its master, who had dug it out of its earth as a baby, brought it home, and looked to its rearing. Him it would allow any liberty. He could take it up, play with it, carry it—in short, do whatever he pleased with it. It came to his call, and "Bill," as the animal was named, would follow him about the house, into his study, anywhere. Bill knew the rest of the family, and treated them with respect; but it cared for none of them as it did for its master. Of strangers it took almost no notice. It lived in a kennel, and was extremely nice and cleanly in its habits. Badgers are sometimes troubled with ticks, especially

behind the ears, but these can be readily got rid of by the application of paraffin, carbolic, or vinegar. Bill had a weakness for hen's eggs, and a sharp look-out had to be kept on him in respect of this failing. His food consisted chiefly of dog-biscuit, a little meat at times, bones, small birds, worms, and various roots and vegetables. He was fond of an apple occasionally. Usually he slept much during the daytime, always waking up towards evening, and being then extremely frisky and full of life. Occasionally he would wander off for a whole day on his own account, drawn, no doubt, by the primeval attraction of the woods and fields.

Another tame badger, mentioned in a Swedish magazine of last year, struck up a great friendship with two dogs, with one of which it occasionally hunted in the woods. High times the two beasts must have had from the combination of their respective hunting talents. After one of these excursions the badger is described by the translator as returning "quite tired out, and in a very bad humour." This badger would never follow a stranger, and hardly anyone but her owner. "If she wanted to go through a door which she could not open either by pushing or pulling, she would seize hold of someone's clothing—for choice a lady's dress—with her teeth, and draw them towards the door, with the evident intention of getting them to help her." Another tame badger, next mentioned, was clever enough to manage an awkward latch and let herself out of the yard.

Mr. E. Lort, writing in the *Field* some time since, gave some extremely interesting particulars of this other tame badger, which he reared from the age of about three months. This animal, named "Sally," was at first somewhat difficult to tame, refusing to eat for a fortnight. She was ultimately tempted by a fresh rabbit's liver, finely chopped. Finally she became

quite tame and greatly attached to her master. At first it seemed hopeless to try and tame her; "when she was not rolled up in a touch-me-not sort of ball, she was snapping and biting at everything. There was nothing for it but to tackle her in a determined way, and this I did," says Mr. Lort, "by getting hold of her by the scruff of the neck—not by any means an easy thing to do, for she could so raise the muscles of her neck that her skin became perfectly tight and rigid. . . . The taming of Sally was not accomplished without painful proof of the strength of the badger's jaw. An 18-lb. badger hanging to the ends of one's fingers a time or two is, to say the least of it, calculated to make a serious impression. Those who have had their digits shut in a door will best realise the sensation." The jaws of a badger form, as a matter of fact, the strongest part of its anatomy. Not only are they armed with thirty-eight teeth—although usually, owing to the shedding of the first premolars at an early age, thirty-four teeth are only present—but the lower jaw is so strongly articulated to the skull that it cannot be separated without fracture. The sharp, strong teeth are so placed in the jaw that they lock together with the closeness and tenacity of a vice. Once the badger gets its grip firmly fixed, it is a hard matter indeed to make it relax that terrible hold; and in the old days of baiting, many a terrier lost one of its jaws, clean torn away by its persecuted and relentless adversary. It is small wonder, indeed, that the badger is so formidable a foe to dogs and other adversaries.

Mr. Lort occasionally took Sally on slugging expeditions into fields of long aftermath. In these she delighted; "and now," says her owner, "when I see in the early morning a track all over the grass fields like that which a broom would leave upon the dew, I

know badgers have been hunting for worms; and I can see the shiny places where they, like Sally, have pressed their noses hard into the turf."

When the worms are retreating into the ground, the badger gets its nose right down on to the soil, and sucks and tugs until its slippery plunder is compelled to yield itself and come away.

This same badger was utilised as a "drag" for a pack of hounds. "I used to take her for a long walk," says her owner, "after giving strict injunctions that the hounds should not be unkennelled until I came to say Sally was safe in her yard, and as a further safeguard, notwithstanding her tremendous weight, I always carried her the first and last part of the way. She weighed twenty-six pounds at her best (or rather worst, for it was most difficult to keep her down), and was a solid dead weight, most tiring to carry, though she kept quite still and often fell asleep under my cape." These few instances will show how tame this animal, normally one of the most shy, suspicious, and retiring of all our wild British fauna, will become, with care, patience, and good treatment.

Sixty years ago, St. John, in his delightful *Wild Sports of the Highlands*, wrote of the badger as likely to become soon extinct in England, although it might survive much longer in the wild and unpeopled North. That prophecy has, happily, not been fulfilled. There are plenty of badgers still pursuing a quiet and happy existence in many parts of England. If huntsmen and keepers and casual sportsmen will give them but fair play and something like a chance for life, there is no reason whatever why these curious animals should not be found flourishing in this country for at least another century.

CHAPTER XXVI

OTTER-HUNTING

A notable revival—"Jack Russell" and his experiences—Otter-hounds—A welcome summer sport—Beauties of the chase—Peripatetic masters—A secretive beast—Otters in Midland streams—A Thames morning—The spear abolished—The death—Strength of packs—Hunting terms—Staff—Terriers—A fierce beast of chase—"Tailing" an otter—Food of these animals—Swimming powers—Weights and measurements—A strange repast—Overland travels—A wonderful hunt.

OTTER-HUNTING, which some years since seemed likely almost to fade out of existence in these islands, has had within the last few years a sudden and remarkable resuscitation. In a book upon sport published some seventy years since occurs the following passage: "Otter-hunting is now little understood, and is quite on the decline in this country." But, happily for this most excellent pastime, a certain number of enthusiastic supporters maintained during a long period of decadence the pursuit of the otter and upheld the hardy breed of hounds necessary for its proper support. The well-known Rev. John Russell, of North Devon, was one of these enthusiasts. In his early days "Parson Jack" understood little or nothing of the difficult science of otter-hunting, and wandered over many hundred miles of country in process of educating himself and his hounds before he was enabled to kill an otter in proper and sportsmanlike fashion. Wales has always been a great stronghold of otter-hunting, and even in the dullest period of this

branch of sport, Welsh otter-hunters, assisted by the strong, keen, rough-coated breed of hounds for which the principality is still famous, pursued this most fierce, cunning, and destructive beast of chase amid some of the most picturesque scenery of the British Isles.

Within the last decade otter-hunting has, as I have said, had a rapid and most remarkable revival. The old-established packs, which were for years only followed by a few ardent supporters, now find their meets thronged with spectators; new packs have sprung into existence, and from north to south and from east to west of England and Wales otter-hunting is to be found during the summer months flourishing exceedingly. In the south of Scotland, the Dumfriesshire, an excellent pack, has for years been maintained. During this last season of 1904, no less than twenty-two packs of hounds took the field, or rather the waterside, in various parts of the United Kingdom. These included three new packs—the Wharfedale, hunting in Yorkshire, the Tetcott, a Devon pack, and the East of Scotland. Of the twenty-two packs no less than fifteen hunt in England. Wales supports three packs; Scotland and Ireland, two apiece.

Coming as it does just upon the tail end of fox-hunting, otter-hunting has peculiar claims upon the sport-loving tastes of the English people. It can be carried on at much less expense than the sister sport. Its pursuit is conducted entirely upon foot, and it can therefore be enjoyed by hundreds who cannot afford to indulge in fox- or hare-hunting; while, if conducted upon reasonable lines, and with due regard to the stock of otters, it rids many a stream and river of a very determined kind of poacher, which for generations has taken, often quite unknown to the angler, a very heavy toll of fish. In the quiet season that follows the

From a photograph by J. Coster.

THE CROWHURST OTTER HOUNDS: MICHELHAM PRIORY.

PLATE XIX.

withdrawal of the fox-hunter's horn and hounds from the countryside, otter-hunting in its modern revival has been received with the heartiest zest and welcome. The farmers can find small objection to a sport which carries with it a minimum of damage to crops and fences. The angler welcomes it gladly. And, despite the fact that otter-hunting has to be pursued at a much earlier hour of the day than with fox and hare hounds, and that meets are usually fixed for six or seven o'clock in the morning, numbers of ladies are now to be found at every fixture, following the exciting chase of this amphibious quarry with the keenest delight, and braving the inevitable terrors of dykes, streams, and wet clothes.

On a fine morning of spring or summer there is, in truth, no more fascinating form of sport than a hunt with otter-hounds. The beauty and freshness of the morning, the charms of river scenery, whether in some picturesque valley of the west, some wild and romantic glen of Wales or the north, or even amid the smooth and placid pastures of middle England, appeal always to the senses. The notes of horn and hound are ever welcome; the excitement of the hunt itself, when every trick and manœuvre of one of the most wary and resourceful of all creatures of chase can be observed, inspires the dullest soul. All these excellent things unite to bring to a novel and most interesting form of sport pleasures that are not easily to be surpassed. It is small wonder, then, that to people of active habit, of either sex, fond, as are all English folk, of open air and the breath of the sweet country, this new pastime appeals with peculiar zest and piquancy.

One great advantage possessed by otter-hounds is that they are easily moved from one district of the country to another. Thus masters of these hounds can and do respond with alacrity to the pressing invitations

often despatched to them from parts of the country far distant from their own headquarters. Some packs make an annual tour and hunt the rivers of several counties. The late Mr. Geoffrey Hill, one of the most enthusiastic masters that ever hunted an otter, wandered far afield, and was as welcome to the farmers and landowners of the Midland shires as to those of Shropshire and Wales. Major Green, of the Dartmoor Otter-hounds, was wont to quit occasionally his own waters for a fortnight's campaign in Ireland. Mr. Courtenay Tracey is another veteran who is well known in many counties.

The otter is so secret and cunning a beast that he may live for years upon a stream without making known his presence to the neighbouring country people. In rivers where salmon and trout are plentiful his devastations, necessarily, become more notorious; he is far more closely watched, and keepers, as well as owners and lessees, of valuable fishings are not likely to tolerate the presence of over many of these bold and most cunning marauders. Where coarse fish only are to be found, and no trouble is taken over their preservation, otters can and do live unmolested for generations. Within the last year or two certain streams in some of the quietest parts of the midlands, where few fishermen troubled the banks, and only shepherds and farmers crossed the fields, have been visited by otter-hounds. Otters were in this locality absolutely undreamed of by the country people. Generations of farmers had lived and died there without a suspicion of the presence of otters, which all the time were flourishing almost at their doors. The lads caught perch and pike and roach and dace and gudgeon in the stream close by, and grew up, and abandoned the sport for graver cares, without ever setting eyes upon the four-footed fishers, which nightly visited the best pools and killed the finest fish.

From a photograph by J. Coster.

PLATE XX.

OTTER-HUNTING—AN ANXIOUS MOMENT.

Yet the advent of otter-hounds and of hunters used to the chase of these creatures proved incontestably that in these very waters otters had long existed. And first-rate hunting has been enjoyed in many of these quiet midland streams, where until quite lately any countryman would have scoffed at the idea of such an outlandish beast being found at all. It is, in truth, indubitable that there are far more otters in this country than most people imagine. Even upon the crowded highway of the Thames otters can and do exist. In the year 1880 I well remember, while bathing at early morning, seeing one of these animals swim quietly across the mouth of the Ember stream, just at its junction with the Thames near Hampton Court.

In some respects otter-hunting has changed during more recent times. When Landseer painted that fine picture, "The Death of the Otter," many years ago, it was still the custom to use the spear. In this picture the otter writhes upon the tall spear held aloft by the red-coated huntsman, surrounded by the pack of rough-coated, ravening hounds. But the spear has gone out of fashion, and the otter usually meets his end, as does the fox, by the teeth of the hounds.

Somervile, in his well-known poem, *The Chace*, shows conclusively that he was well acquainted with the pursuit of the otter as well as of fox and hare. He hunted all three indifferently, amusing himself with the chase of the otter in summer-time, and returning to the pursuit of the hare and fox in winter. In his time, as I have shown in Chapter XXII., the spear was commonly used.

The ancient rough-coated otter-hound seems to have been derived from a cross between the old Southern hound and a large rough terrier. Of this strain the hardy Welsh hound is, no doubt, a lineal descendant.

Some masters now use both foxhounds and otter-hounds, on the ground that while the otter-hounds are best in the water, foxhounds, although much harder to enter to this sport, are of great use at those times when the quarry quits the stream and betakes himself, as he often does, to the land. An otter, web-footed and amphibious beast though he is, can, indeed, get over the ground for a few fields at a quite surprising pace.

We are told that in Queen Elizabeth's time otter-hunting was a favourite amusement for "the young gentry of Great Britain"—a mere schoolboy's sport, evidently, like ratting and rabbiting. To-day its modern revival appeals to a far wider range of followers. Purely pedestrian sport as it is, no pastime can surely be a healthier one. It carries with it the certainty of early hours and plenty of exercise. And perhaps not the least of its recommendations lies in the fact that, from its very nature, otter-hunting can never be surrounded with the artificiality and luxuries by which, in time, certain of our open-air sports seem likely to be emasculated, if not completely strangled.

At the present day a pack of otter-hounds usually numbers from ten to fourteen or fifteen couples, but some few of the bigger establishments are larger. The Hawkstone, for instance, a famous pack hunting in Wales and Shropshire, are as many as twenty-five couples strong, while the King's, hunting in King's County, Ireland, muster the same number. With fifteen couple of hounds plenty of sport can be shown, provided otters are to be found. Otter-hunting has a complete language of its own. Thus the footprints are known to the initiated as the "spur" or "seal," the latter term being the more commonly used. The "spraint," or "wedging," is the excreta of the otter, by which the animal is occasionally identified. The

From a photograph by J. Coster.

PLATE XXI. OTTER-HUNTING—CROSSING TO A HOLT.

"chain" is the line of air bubbles, or "bells," sent up by this animal as it swims under water — the cry "bubble avent" is sometimes used by country-folk, or hunters, when this sign of the beast's passage is noted. The otter is "put down" when he is driven from his holt, or hiding-place. The animal is "gazed," not "viewed." "Heu gaze!" is the cry used when the beast is sighted. The otter's lair or resting-place is known variously as "holt," "lodge," "kennel," "couch," and "hover."

The staff consists of a huntsman, usually an enthusiastic amateur, and two whips, and much assistance is often rendered by those followers who understand the sport, and who, armed with long poles, are not afraid to rush middle deep, if necessary, into the stream and turn the hunted beast from some holt or other secure place of vantage towards which it is making. Two or three terriers, preferably rough-coated, are usually taken out, for the purpose of pushing the beast from its holt; without these useful allies it would often be a difficult matter to shift the otter from its resting-place. An otter is a sufficiently formidable beast of chase, and the terrier that has to tackle him must be a hardy and high-couraged one; no creature, in fact, knows better how to use its teeth than an otter, and the unaccustomed spectator will do well not to try to "tail" or otherwise meddle with one of these animals in the course of the hunt, if he values his fingers. "Tailing" an otter—that is, seizing the beast by his tail and flinging him to the hounds, or turning him, is an operation of extreme nicety, and only old hands know how to achieve it successfully. The tail, by the way, is, in otter-hunting parlance, often known as the "pole"; while the feet are termed "pads," as in fox- and hare-hunting.

Otters are by no means such enormously destructive animals in a fishery as they are so often alleged to be —unless, that is to say, they infest small and confined waters, where the fish have little chance of escape. There, of course, a family or two of otters might wreak great havoc and soon clear a stream. They will, of course, devour coarse fish and even trout and salmon, but their diet consists largely of eels and frogs. In the case of fish the beast usually begins to devour his prey at the shoulder, while if an eel is captured he proceeds from the vent towards the head. There is no finer swimmer among the mammalia than this singular creature. It uses its limbs, it is true, like other four-footed beasts, but ages of a watery environment have so developed its powers under water that the whole of the frame, legs, tail, and lithe body, are brought into play, the result being that the animal in its course can scarcely be distinguished from a salmon, or other large fish, even by men well acquainted with its habits. Its speed, endurance, and diving powers are truly wonderful.

These animals vary a good deal in weight. A dog otter, shot in Essex, on the River Stour, in 1897, scaled 29¾ lbs., and measured 4 ft. 3½ ins. from nose to tip of tail. A fair-sized male otter will weigh from 20 lbs. to 25 lbs., the female some pounds less.

Some curious customs seem to have been in vogue in connection with otter-hunting in former days. In 1796, near Bridgnorth, on the River Worse, I read, in an old sporting book, "four otters were killed; one stood three, another four hours before the dogs, and was scarcely a minute out of sight. The hearts, etc., were eaten by many respectable people, who attended the hunt, and allowed to be very delicious; the carcasses were also eaten by the men employed, and found

to be excellent." Such fare, I will warrant, could scarcely find favour with sportsmen of the present day.

Occasionally otters will perform long journeys overland, either because food fails them, or they are on errands of courtship, or for some other reason. When this happens and hounds hit upon the trail, the hunt is as exciting as it is novel. Mr. Collier's otter-hounds, hunting in the New Forest some years ago, hit upon the line of a travelling bitch otter and pursued her on land for a distance of not less than twelve miles, killing their quarry near Lyndhurst after a quite extraordinary hunt. In June of the year 1902 the Culmstock otter-hounds pursued an inland trail for several miles, hunting through various coverts and spinnies, through which the otter had undoubtedly passed.

CHAPTER XXVII

PALLAS'S SAND-GROUSE

An inhabitant of Central Asia—First appearance in England—Migrations of cross-bills—Records of appearance of sand-grouse—Reasons for visitation—Migration of 1888—Considerable numbers shot—Appearance in Norway—Moulting period—Weight of bird—Habits—Sand-grouse in South Africa—Drinking-time—Flight-shooting—Protective colouring—Characteristics of these birds—European species.

THIS interesting species, whose natural habitat lies in the dreary Kirghiz Steppes of Central Asia, once again made its appearance in England in 1899. It is far more than probable that Pallas's sand-grouse, driven from its ancient abiding-places in Central Asia by some inexorable pressure of nature, has been in the habit of migrating temporarily into Western Europe during long ages of the past. But until the nineteenth century we have no record of its occurrence in England. During the Middle Ages and much later, down even to the time of Gilbert White, men were not much in the habit of recording the habits and appearances of rare birds. There is, it is true, a curious tradition of overwhelming migrations of cross-bills into England in the reigns of Edward III. and Elizabeth; but the coming of this species seems to have attracted notice mainly from the fact that great flocks devastated the fruit orchards and ruined much of the apple crop in the years of this strange and unwonted visitation. It is certain that White of Selborne makes no mention of the sand-grouse, nor does he or any of

his contemporaries appear to have been acquainted with it. Pallas's sand-grouse has invaded Britain and other parts of Europe in recent times in the years 1863, 1872, 1873, 1888, and 1889. To this record we have to add the year of 1899. It is difficult to say what impels these birds in their far migration from the deserts of Central Asia. Probably scarcity of food has a good deal to do with the matter. From the latest appearance of one of these sand-grouse in Lincolnshire, noticed first at the end of January in that year, it is more than possible that a great fall of snow was accountable for their arrival in Europe. Swinhoe, in writing of these birds, mentions that in their own country they are driven south by snowfalls, and that the natives, by clearing snow from small tracts of ground, are at times enabled to net a whole flock. As sand-grouse usually move in large bodies, such a haul would obviously be a very welcome one to the half-starved denizens of the wintry steppes.

The principal migration of Pallas's sand-grouse to Great Britain in recent years happened, as many readers will remember, in 1888. In that season many examples were seen and shot in different parts of the country. The largest number observed in one flock seems to have been about sixty. In several localities there can be little doubt that pairs of these birds bred, but, from various causes, the species was not acclimatised, and, after a year or two, the immigrants had vanished—many were shot, some died, the rest probably betook themselves eastward again. During this strange migration many hundreds were observed passing westward beyond the coast of Ireland, and there can be little doubt that, as with other migratory species, some thousands found their last resting-place in the Atlantic Ocean. When these birds first appeared in

England they were frequently mistaken for golden or grey plover. Those eager gunners who, unhappily, are always on the look-out for rare species, secured large numbers of them, and the local taxidermists had a busy time of it. This thirst for shooting every rare or unwonted kind of bird is accountable for the disappearance of many interesting forms of feathered life in these islands.

During this migration of 1888, Pallas's sand-grouse was found far and wide in Western Europe. Its most northerly occurrence seems to have been near Trondhjem, in western Norway.

It was observed during its stay in this country that the bird was moulting between May and the end of September. By the middle of October the change of plumage seems to have been accomplished, and the bird had assumed its proper coat and condition. Mr. Tegetmeier weighed about this time a hen bird which had been shot in Norfolk; she was then in first-rate condition and scaled eleven ounces. There can be little doubt that large numbers of Pallas's sand-grouse were shot in England when partially disabled by the exigencies of the moulting period. When in full plumage no birds in the world are finer or more swift and enduring flyers. At the same time, as sand-grouse are but little shot at in the deserts which form their natural home, they are singularly fearless of mankind. The habits of Pallas's sand-grouse, as described by General Prejevalski, the well-known traveller in Central Asia, resemble almost exactly those of the various sand-grouse of South Africa. At the drinking-places they circle round the water. Presently they alight, "hastily drink, and rise again, and, in cases where the flocks are large, the birds in front get up before those at the back have time to alight. They know their

drinking-places very well, and very often go to them from distances of tens of miles, especially in the mornings between nine and ten o'clock, but after twelve at noon they seldom visit these spots."

In crossing the Kalahari Desert in South Africa, where immense numbers of four different kinds of sand-grouse are to be found making their home, I have observed these birds very closely, and I am inclined to think that Prejevalski's estimate of a range of "tens of miles" made by sand-grouse during the day, when in search of food, is somewhat too moderate a one. Few birds are better provided by nature with powers of flight. A glance at the structure of a sand-grouse at once convinces the observer on this point. The long and sharply pointed wings and tail are exactly designed by nature for those unsurpassed feats of passage which these birds exhibit. The deep breast-bone, the strong wing-bones, and tremendous wing muscles at once tell their inevitable tale.

In the Kalahari country, at the scant desert waters, three kinds of sand-grouse, the so-called "Namaqua partridge" of the Dutch colonists, the yellow-throated sand-grouse, and the variegated sand-grouse, are to be seen flocking in from all parts of the country from eight to ten o'clock a.m. for their day's drink. Circling swiftly round the pool with sharp cries, they suddenly stoop together towards the water. The noisy rustle of their wings as they alight and ascend is most remarkable. My hunting companion and I noticed that the birds nearest the water drank quickly and moved off, allowing those in rear to take their places and slake their thirst, the whole process being accomplished with unfailing order and regularity. The beautiful double-banded sand-grouse we more often found drinking towards evening, while the Namaqua sand-grouse and

occasionally the big yellow-throated sand-grouse drank at that time also. But the greatest assemblages were in the morning. The spectacle of these punctual creatures, streaming in from all parts of the compass with unfailing regularity between eight and ten o'clock, was always most fascinating. After drinking they circled once or twice round the water pool, and then flew off with amazing swiftness for their day of feeding in the dry, sun-scorched desert. The seeds of grass and other desert plants seem to constitute their principal food. We could have shot hundreds of these birds on these occasions; we actually bagged a few score brace at different times for our bushmen and followers. At times, one is sorry to say, fifty or a hundred of these beautiful creatures are shot by some wantonly murderous gunner as they descend in a body or sit at the water drinking. The flesh of sand-grouse is dry and not equal in flavour or quality to that of the true game-birds. The skins of the various South African species, and probably of most of the others, are marvellously tough, and give much trouble in divesting these birds of their plumage.

For some time sand-grouse puzzled the earlier naturalists a good deal. They are a singular blending of two very different orders, and partake largely of the characteristics of both grouse and pigeon. In their heads and the shape of their bodies they strongly resemble the pigeon; their splendid flight is, too, far more like that of the pigeon than of the grouse. Against these characteristics are to be set the grouse-like feathering of the legs and feet. In one species at least, the great yellow-throated sand-grouse of South Africa, the under colouring of the body plumage—a deep chocolate-brown—and the cry are also strongly grouse-like. The upper colouring of all this family

is marvellously protective, and matches excellently with the sandy hue of the deserts in which they live.

Sand-grouse are usually placed by scientific naturalists in two genera, *Pterocles* and *Syrrhaptes*, of which the former are by far the more plentiful. The *Syrrhaptes*—found only in Asia—include only two species, of which Pallas's sand-grouse (*Syrrhaptes paradoxus*) is one, the other being the Tibetan sand-grouse (*S. tibetanus*). These two species of *Syrrhaptes* are distinguished by a most curious development of foot, which has been most aptly likened to a "fingerless glove." The other genus, *Pterocles*, is scattered widely over Africa and Asia. Two out of the fifteen species, the common and pin-tailed sand-grouse, are found in Europe, the former in Portugal, Spain, and Southern Russia, the latter occurring in the south of France as well as in South Russia and the Iberian Peninsula. Singularly enough, this sand-grouse is known in France as "Le perdrix d'Angleterre." Pallas's sand-grouse has a wide habitat in Asia, ranging from Manchuria almost up to the Ural Mountains and River.

CHAPTER XXVIII

QUIET PARTRIDGE-SHOOTING

September joys—The Briton abroad—Cherished memories—The first partridge—Shooting over dogs—Old-time bags—Partridge-driving—Pleasures of "dogging"—A fair day's sport—Modern methods—An old shot belt—Partridge-netting with a setter—Still practised in eighteenth century—Courage of the partridge—Suppression of scent—A strange pet—"Towering"—Phenomenal bags—Hungarian partridges and their introduction—Big shoots on Baron Hirsch's estates—Weight of English and red-legged partridges.

WHETHER he is young or old; whether he takes the field equipped for the pursuit of partridges in the most perfect style of *fin de siècle* shooting, with an army of beaters and every adjunct that luxury can desire, prepared to count his evening bag by the hundred; or whether with a brace of friends and a retriever or two he sallies forth upon some quiet manor to account for a modest fifteen or twenty brace of birds, the gunner can recall few greater annual pleasures than the first days of September. Partridge-shooting is undoubtedly by far the most generally popular of all British field sports. It appeals to the farmer with his old pin-fire gun and his still undiscarded setter or pointer, or to the rural townsman with his "little bit of shooting" five miles from the market town, just as much as to the great landowner of many hundred Norfolk acres, or the rich Londoner, who cares little what his sport costs him, so long as he and his friends make a bag.

QUIET PARTRIDGE-SHOOTING

The wanderer in far-off countries often comes across birds of the partridge kind, which, although encountered amid the roughs and tumbles of foreign sport or exploration, bring back warm to his memory the comely brown birds of old England, the yellow stubble fields, cool areas of turnips and swedes, lush green meadows, old-fashioned homesteads, and many another September association dear to the Briton abroad. And although the sport among big game, whether in Africa, Asia, or America, may be keen and exciting enough to satisfy the most insatiable hunter, few men abroad can erase from the tablets of their recollection those delightful autumn days passed amid the fields and hedgerows of old England.

Who can forget his first partridge? I for my part—and I believe that my memory is very much the memory of every gunner—can call to mind the very spot in the very field in which breathlessly I slew my first bird. It is a good many years ago now, yet I recall clearly each circumstance of that great event. I remember well the ancient brown walls and deep thatch of "the Old Barn" hard by, a Northamptonshire barn, bearing on its warm sandstone gable-end the date 1642. I remember crossing "the Old Barn ground" and then entering a piece of fallow, where I knew that some birds lay. And well I remember walking that fallow with a beating heart. I was alone, armed with an old single muzzle-loader. The whole scene at this moment rises clear before me. Three birds get up within easy shot; I take aim at the nearest and fire, and to my astonishment and delight down drops to the red earth my first partridge. The indescribable rapture of that moment can never fade. And when, in the piece of clover to which the odd brace have betaken themselves, I positively bring

down another bird, my measure of happiness is indeed complete. That first joy of the youthful gunner can never again be quite recalled; yet, to the average healthy-minded man, September days spent in the pursuit of partridges bring about as much happiness as is to be extracted from this vale of care.

The beginning of the twentieth century, with its complete departure from the old partridge-shooting ways and ideas, its wonderful improvements in guns and powder, and its extremely scientific methods on large estates, where huge bags are expected and made, may have brought partridge-shooting within the reach of far more gunners than of old; yet it may be questioned whether, for pure pleasure of sport, we are any better off than were our grandfathers, with their flint or percussion guns and deliberate habits.

The keen delight of shooting over dogs is more and more becoming a thing of the past. For my part I can never cease to envy the sportsmen of the first three-quarters of the last century, who shot over pointers and setters, took their time, walked steadily all day, and were content with moderate bags. It is, however, a mistake to believe that the immense bags made by modern gunners at big partridge drives are new to gunnery. On the great sporting estate of Holkham, in Norfolk, where for generations partridge-shooting has been a passion, more birds were killed in the years 1797, 1798, and 1800[1] than in the two best seasons between 1860 and 1870. Upon other sporting estates very large bags of partridges were made before 1800, even with the old flint and steel weapon. Partridges in those days seem to have been generally even more plentiful than they are at the present time.

[1] In these years the season's bag at Holkham included 3,800, 3,965, and 3,865 partridges respectively.

QUIET PARTRIDGE-SHOOTING.

(From an old print.)

PLATE XXII.

On the other hand, the number of men taking out licences to kill game was absurdly small, and the areas shot over by the gunners were immense. My own grandfather, who shot in quite a quiet way, had, with a neighbouring friend, besides their own property, the whole of the shooting for twelve miles in a crow's line, in the counties of Warwick and Northampton. They were the only gunners of their particular neighbourhood, and, with their old-fashioned early English pointers, they ranged through quite a host of parishes. And in those days, be it remembered, they paid nothing for their sport, beyond giving away a certain percentage of their birds to the farmers whose land they shot over. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century the men who handled guns and shot birds flying were few and far between, and the taking out of a game licence was quite a solemn performance. Now, everybody must shoot, and to the plethora of gunners, undoubtedly, much of the decay of the older and quieter—and, we may say, perhaps, more enjoyable—form of sport is to be attributed. Modern farming and lack of covert has of course a good deal to do with the exile of sporting dogs from the field, but driving and walking up on a large scale owe their origin not a little to the increase in numbers and to the more busy habits and even the impatience of the modern sportsman.

And yet, what a wonderful charm there was and still is in quiet places in shooting over dogs, and steadily pursuing the partridge through golden stubble, tender clover, and lush fields of roots, dripping with autumn moisture! The very pleasure of seeing a well-broken pointer or setter, or still better a brace of them, work is worth many a big bag obtained by the somewhat mechanical processes of modern walking up in line or

driving. Driving, which nowadays claims so many ardent votaries, has of course much to recommend it. It appeals to busy men who cannot afford time to be pottering quietly about, and to be content with small bags. A few big shoots in the season, with heavy bags at the end of them, suit the multitude, in these days of stress and hurry, far better than sport more evenly distributed and moderate bags. Yet it is unquestionable that the modern shooter who waits under hedges for driven birds, or, a mere unit in a line of gunners or beaters, walks up his birds without the aid of setters or pointers, misses a great deal of the purest essence of sport and woodcraft. Shooting is becoming far too much a cut-and-dried pastime, a mere machine-like process for slaughtering game. It is a somewhat melancholy sign of the times, when one peruses recent books on partridge-shooting and finds no reference whatever to pointers and setters.

Who that has seen dogs work in the field can ever forget the thrill of pleasure and expectancy with which one notes the staunch setter, after a careful range, drawing stealthily upon his game? Who can forget the attitude, motionless as a statue of bronze, of a pointer close upon the covey? Who can measure the feeling of delightful expectancy with which the gunner approaches the setting or pointing dog, or that supreme moment when at last the birds rise and he gets in his two barrels? Such episodes add fifty-fold to the charm of shooting. Those old-fashioned gentlemen who went into the stubbles on the first with their Dons and their Pontos had a far better time of it, in reality, than the sportsman who drives to his shoot, kicks his heels under a hedge, bags his driven birds now and again for a few breathless minutes with the mechanical precision (or otherwise) of a Carver or Bogardus, and, as

likely as not, gets a thorough chill to go home with. The modern shooting man is, I fear, too ambitious to be merely a "good performer"; he can kill his birds in excellent style, but he sees little of real sport, which I take to be the finding with care and difficulty, as well as the killing, of your game. However, we may console ourselves with the thoughts that here and there, even in this year 1904, one can still accomplish the rare feat of bagging a brace or two of birds among the corn stooks. There are still quiet bits of countryside, almost forgotten back-waters, left by the rapid stream of latter-day sport, where the corn is still occasionally cut by hand and not by the smooth-shaving mowing machine; or perhaps, the crops having been laid by wind or rain, the sickle has to take the place of the machine, and there is good lying for the birds. What a real pleasure it is, with another gun or two and reliable dogs, to get out early into the stubble before the partridges have retired for their siesta, and follow the keen pointer or the more active setter in his quarterings! There may be some potatoes to follow the birds into, or a field or two of turnips, or a piece of clover—a certain find after the birds have scattered a little; perchance we may even alight on those good old-fashioned luxuries, a field of beans or a bit of standing barley. If a man cannot hit birds rising at his elbow or under his nose from that magnificent background for the gunner's eye, a piece of fair white barley, he may go home and put up his gun. Was it not an old dean—one of the almost forgotten school of divines who shot and hunted—who upon his deathbed solemnly enjoined his son never to forget to keep for September shooting a patch of standing barley? An hour or two before lunch the bag is steadily mounting up, and the gunners and dogs may turn their attention to those odd nooks

and corners that partridges scattered by the morning's shooting betake themselves to. And here the real knowledge of birds and their ways, too often unknown to the mere shooting man, comes in. Here begins something of the real woodcraft of the partridge-shooter. There is a world of art required for the proper securing of partridges driven to bethink themselves of those tricks of cunning of which these birds are in reality such masters. How close a bird will lie where covert is thick and grass and leafage are ample, and how hard a matter it often is to pick up a wounded partridge! Here the steady, poking ways of the retriever or spaniel, hitherto led by the keeper, are often invaluable. Perchance during this bit of sport an odd covey of birds which left the cornfield earlier than their fellows, and are now sunning themselves on some dry knoll, may be encountered. The tribute of a leash is taken ere they are beyond range, and the remainder are marked over yon tall hedge into some roots. The hedgerow sport finished, we cross a lush field of aftermath, and the pointer quickly tells us that here too are some stragglers. From out the rich carpet of greenery we flush, one after another, a good brace, which, so close have they lain, fall easy victims. Before tackling the big field of swedes, lunch and a pipe are discussed, and then once more we are afoot. The mellow afternoon wears on, the bag mounts up, and at 4.30, as we count out the slain on the smooth lawn in front of the old white house, there lie before us eighteen brace of birds, a brace of landrails, half a dozen rabbits, and a hare. A modest total, it is true; yet such a bag, made over dogs, is in the mind of the quiet gunner worth fifty, ay, a hundred brace of driven partridges. The pity of it is that this form of sport steadily nears its end. Its decline began in 1870, or a little before; its

complete extinction may be supposed to be looked for before 1950.

I am of course quite aware that in most parts of England the change in farming methods effectually precludes the use of a pointer or setter. Yet it is incontestable that in some localities, especially where enclosures are small and broken up—as in North Devon, for instance—excellent sport over dogs can be and still is obtained. In such localities driving is impossible, and walking up in line is a matter of great difficulty, owing to the height of the banks, the deepness of the lanes, and the frequency of obstacles. In such places I have, even within the last few years, enjoyed some capital shooting over pointers. Many modern sportsmen seem to be under the impression that partridge-shooting over dogs is absolutely extinct in Britain. That is by no means the case. Here is a letter from the *Field* of 21st October, 1899, which shows that really good shooting is still obtained in this way in quiet parts of the country :—

"Your correspondent, 'Index,' apropos of my article on this subject, asks two questions. One you have answered ; it gives me much pleasure to reply to the other. The ground is largely grass land, old pasture, and young grass. There are some allotments, with the usual crops, and there are a few small root fields. The object of the article was to encourage the use of dogs. The following particulars of this season's bags over dogs may help in the matter, and at the same time convince 'Index' that such sport is not fanciful. Birds plentiful, but mostly wild. Brace in September : 15, 9, 11, 23½, 15½, 12½, 24, 7½, 19, 14½, 9½, 17½, 10½, 13½, 10. In October : 7½, 20, 14½. All these bags were made over dogs.

"(Signed) L."

These figures seem to me excellent. They offer clear proof that "dogging," although it may be in its de-

cadence, is not yet quite a thing of the past. They should encourage those who still have a fancy for quiet sport of this kind not to be laughed out of their pleasures by men who believe only in big shoots, big lunches, and big bags. In the same number of the *Field* in which the above letter appeared another sportsman wrote to say that he was one of a party of three guns who killed fifteen brace of partridges over dogs in a short day of four hours during the last week of September. And yet another writer added that on October 14th he had killed, to his own gun, nine brace of birds over a pointer dog, besides sundry "various." These and other evidences, together with my own experiences, tell me that although shooting over dogs has been completely abandoned in most districts, it is still pursued quietly here and there. Probably it will be so pursued for a good many years to come. I believe that upon the whole the man who shoots over dogs, although he may not be so good a performer with the gun as his neighbour, who will condescend to shoot only driven birds, obtains in the aggregate a good deal more pleasure, more healthy exercise, and more variety from his method of shooting.

Yet although men, even now only arrived at middle age, who were entered to shooting over dogs, may excusably lament the decadence of this delightful form of sport, there is still much to be thankful for. There is plenty of room in broad England for the various forms of shooting now practised. Happy is the man who, although he may have a leaning to a particular style of sport, can yet find pleasure in any one of them. The partridges are still with us always; the face of old England changes but little in the procession of the years; there is still plenty of sport and good-fellowship to be gleaned from the pursuit of the bird of September.

For the average active Englishman "walking up" birds is an excellent pastime, giving as it does a fair amount of healthy exercise, with plenty of opportunity for shooting skill. "Half-mooning," if scientifically carried out, is a fascinating form of sport. Not only do the guns forming the points of the half-moon get their share of sport, but those birds passed by the widely extended horns rise at length, break back, and often afford magnificent shooting to the men composing the base of the figure.

But, after all, "driving" is the sport that nowadays, as in grouse-shooting, seems to appeal to the greatest happiness of the greatest number. First practised, it is believed, only some five-and-forty years ago, partridge-driving has rapidly gained an immense hold on the shooting public. It has, admittedly, many and great fascinations: it appeals to every instinct of eye and hand; and the man who can account for driven partridges featly and well, may reckon himself good enough to shoot anything. On a dry, clear day of autumn, with the warm, lingering touch of autumnal sunshine upon the air, when the crisp leaves lie lightly upon the sward, the blackberry sprays are full of crimson, and the pearly dew glistens upon every stem of grass, then, as you stand behind your hedgerow prepared for action, life seems to be very well worth living. And if you are good enough to stop your share of the brown, short-winged forms that skim whirring through the clear, still air, whether approaching or going away from you, then, having done your duty by your gun and your host's partridges, you may go home well content. In these days, when invention follows upon the heels of invention, the sportsman can, at all events, have but little to complain of in the matter of guns and gun gear. Smokeless powders

have deprived shooting of half its former drawbacks. Smokeless cartridges, loaded by good makers, are usually so perfect, and are to be obtained at such reasonable prices, that black powder has become as out of date as the flint and steel itself. As for guns, they seem to be rapidly approaching perfection. Even the shooter of weak physique, or the lady gunner can now obtain a good, hard killing weapon, combining marvellous lightness with absence of recoil, so that shooting with it is a positive luxury.

Sportsmen and women of this year of grace have indeed much to be thankful for. I often look at an old shot belt of my grandfather's, with its long, leather, snake-like bag, which buckled round the body and over the shoulder. From this engine of terror the shot were poured into a little brass scoop, which fitted with a catch into the top of the pouch. The contents of the scoop, when charged, were then poured down the gun-barrel. What an operation—of itself only a part of the very serious business of loading—for frozen fingers on a winter's day! That belt was in use only sixty or seventy years ago. When one contrasts the ancient paraphernalia of shooting with the luxurious and labour-saving equipments of the present day, one can only lift up one's hands and exclaim, with Dominie Sampson, "Prodigious!"

It is a curious fact, perhaps worth recalling, that partridge-netting was pursued by country gentlemen down to the end of the eighteenth century. My own grandfather was born in 1774; he lived to see the flint-lock superseded by the percussion cap, but not to witness the triumph of the breechloader over the percussion system. In his youth it is quite probable that he may have seen or known of partridge-netting. This method of sport—for it was undoubtedly classed by

NETTING PARTRIDGES WITH A SETTER.

PLATE XXIII. (From an old drawing.)

our ancestors as a fair and honourable way of taking birds—was of course the survival of a period when guns were so cumbersome and so heavy that it was impossible to shoot birds flying with them. Shooting flying was not, in fact, much practised in England before the period of Charles II. The illustration, taken from an old drawing of 1799, by Samuel Howitt, shows excellently well the method of netting partridges. A well-broken setter was employed to find the game, when, the partridges located, two men advanced very quietly with a net and secured the covey. It is probable that in those days, the birds, from not being much fired at, lay much more closely than they do at present. It is certainly curious to find this sport obtaining so lately as the close of the eighteenth century, and even included in a book of plates of British Field Sports published by Howitt at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the *Gentleman's Recreation*, published in 1677, are given very minute directions "How to take Partridges with a Setting-dog." "There is no art of taking partridges so excellent and pleasant," says the author, Nicholas Cox, "as by the helping of a Setting-dog." . . . "You are to understand then, that a Setting-dog is a certain lusty Land-spaniel, taught by nature to hunt the partridge more than any chace whatever, running the fields over with such alacrity and nimbleness as if there was no limit to his fury and desire; and yet by art under such excellent command that in the very height of his career, by a hem or sound of his master's voice, he should stand, gaze about him, look in his master's face, and observe his directions." Here, undoubtedly, is the ancestor of our setters of the present day. These old-fashioned "Setting-dogs" were broken with extreme care—the curious inquirer will find very full directions in the pages of

Nicholas Cox—and were usually trained to "set" or lie flat on finding game. This habit is to be found still persistent in old-fashioned breeds of setters. Having found the covey, says Cox, "draw forth your net and prick one end to the ground, and spread your net all open, and so cover as many of the partridges as you can; which done, make in with a noise and spring up the partridges, which shall no sooner rise, but they will be entangled in the net. And if you shall let go the old cock and hen, it will not only be an act like a gentleman, but a means to increase your pastime." Our ancestors, although they possessed very poor and primitive weapons in those days, were great at woodcraft; they had many curious devices for taking game, and were, moreover, evidently first-rate breakers of sporting dogs.

The partridge is a singular combination of nervousness and courage. Its natural fear of mankind and its incessant dread of the assaults of such bloodthirsty enemies as stoats, weasels, foxes, and hawks, are of course well known, yet few creatures are more truly courageous. During the pairing season the male partridge is one of the most pugnacious and determined of all birds, and the courage and devotion shown by both the parents in defence of their young is, in its way, almost unequalled. In the days when kites were still plentiful in Britain, Markwick, a reliable observer, has placed it upon record that he has seen the old birds fly up at this most formidable bird of prey "screaming and fighting with all their might," in order to preserve their brood from its assault. A hen partridge will stand up boldly in defence of her nestling, even against so blood-stained and terrifying a marauder as the weasel or stoat. In passive defence of her young she is equally brave, and will suffer herself to be carried

from her nest sooner than desert her eggs or nestlings. Mr. Macpherson, in his monograph on this bird, mentions a case of a sitting hen partridge which allowed a schoolgirl to pick her up from her nest and carry her home in her apron, a distance of a mile. Happily the order was at once given to replace her, and the brave mother not only quietly resumed her seat, but in due time hatched out a handsome covey of partridges. When the young are hatched, the old birds are equally courageous, and will practise curious shifts and stratagems to save their fledglings. A partridge has been seen to feign itself wounded, and run tumbling and apparently lame just in front of the nose of a pointer, which had come suddenly upon its brood; and this stratagem was not once, but twice enacted.

It has been asserted by many naturalists, sportsmen, and gamekeepers that, during the nesting season, the hen partridge loses for the time, or has the power of suppressing the strong scent which characterises her race. And it has been even said that the nearer a bird nests to a path or building, the greater is this power of suppression. This is a point in natural history which, it seems to me, has never yet been established. There are some people who observe carefully who are by no means convinced of the partridge's power of suppression in this respect. Only a year or so back a writer to the *Field* stated that a fox-terrier of his had found several nests of pheasants and partridges, some with eggs only, some with the birds sitting. "He winds them at a considerable distance," says the writer, "and when close to the nest points and wags his tail violently." As this fox-terrier seemed also to be in the habit of finding nests of hens and even of small birds, he may have developed a faculty not possessed by all sporting dogs.

It is probable, I think, that by the mere fact of sitting very closely in her nest, and keeping her feathers tightly about her, the partridge—and the hen of other game-birds while nesting—does actually suppress much of the scent that ordinarily issues from her body. It is not difficult to conceive that in motion, and especially in a breeze, when her feathers are stirred by the wandering air, the bird's scent is much more readily distributed abroad. In the same way, it is a well-known fact that harriers and beagles find it extremely difficult to locate a sitting hare. While in her form, sitting tightly crouched and quiescent, a hare certainly appears to be able to suppress much of the scent that usually proves her destruction. How often a pack of hounds will draw right over the form of a sitting hare, or even over a hare squatting in the middle of a hard run, without winding the animal! Yet the instant that animal is in motion a strong scent is afforded, and hounds dash off in full cry. The mere act of quiescence, of sitting very still and very close, so low that the air in its passage scarcely touches the crouching animal, whether it be bird or hare, has, I am convinced, something to do with this vexed question. It may be that, in addition, the nesting partridge has some actual power of suppression of her own. This, in the very nature of things, is a hard matter to prove or disprove; we can only accept circumstantial evidence, much of which does undoubtedly point to the conclusion that a sitting game-bird, be it partridge, grouse, pheasant, or other species, is much more difficult of finding, even by well-nosed sporting dogs, than is the same bird when abroad in the fields, or in motion.

Few birds make tamer or more interesting pets than the partridge. Years ago a Sussex lady had a tame partridge, which she kept about her for many seasons.

It came into her possession as a tiny chick, and displayed extraordinary affection and intelligence. It had the run of the house, but its favourite abiding-place was the dining-room, where, perched on the back of its mistress's chair, it was in her presence thoroughly happy. In the absence of this lady it showed undoubted marks of grief and concern. At bedtime it invariably followed its mistress upstairs and took up its position near the head of her bed. Other instances of the successful taming of young partridges are well authenticated. It is a fact worth knowing that tame partridges, kept about a place in the country, are useful in attracting a stock of wild birds near home. The late Mr. Francis Francis, the well-known angler and sportsman, fully established this circumstance at his place in South Bucks.

A good deal of misconception still exists touching the handsome horseshoe marking which is so often found adorning the breast of our English birds. It ought to be remembered that this marking is either entirely absent, or very imperfectly developed, in the full-grown female. It distinguishes the adult male, but not the immature male bird; while it is, curiously enough, to be found on the breast of the young female.

Why does the partridge tower? That is a question once hotly debated, but now set completely at rest. A towering bird has been so hit that it suffers from an escape of blood into the lungs or windpipe. It chokes, and, in its piteous desire for air, flies upward and upward until it can fly no longer. Then it falls, rocket-like, to earth, and is found stone-dead, usually on its back.

An abnormally dry season (preceded by a good nesting-time), such as those of 1893 and 1897, suits partridges better than any other. There probably never

were more partridges in Britain than during the shooting season of the latter year. Gilbert White long ago pointed out how these birds favour a parching year. "In the dry summers of 1740 and 1741," he says, "and for some years after, they swarmed to such a degree that parties of unreasonable sportsmen killed twenty and sometimes thirty brace a day." What, I wonder, would our modern gunners say of such prodigious bags? And what would Gilbert White have thought of the six compilers of a bag of 1,458 partridges in a single day of Hampshire shooting—a record made in 1897 at The Grange, Lord Ashburton's place in that county? It is enough to make the old parson-naturalist shift uneasily in his grave!

Hungarian partridges, which are of the same species as our own British bird, have for some years past been freely imported into this country and turned down. It is claimed for them, and, I think, with reason, that they have been a decided success, adding largely to the stock of native-grown birds, and contributing in a very marked degree to the improvement of sport in localities where partridge-shooting had been no better than moderate. The blend seems to be a good one; the foreign birds are strong and hardy, and free from disease; and there seems no reason to doubt that the stock of indigenous birds will be actually improved and strengthened by this introduction: such, at least, is the impression of those most competent to form an opinion. The Duke of Portland has been one of the largest importers of Hungarian birds, which have been turned down chiefly upon his Nottinghamshire estates. Here the shooting has been enormously improved. Some years ago, before the introduction of these birds, a bag of 200 brace of partridges in a day was there looked upon as a really good one. During a recent

season (1902), in one day's shooting, no fewer than 612 brace were accounted for, and that in a year which was universally reckoned a very poor one for partridges. During the season of 1901–2 no less than 5,504 birds were shot on these estates; while for the previous season, 1900–1, the total bag was 4,145 birds. Most of these birds were, of course, obtained by driving. Upon other estates the success of this introduction of Hungarian birds has also been demonstrated.

In Hungary partridge-driving has been carried to an even higher stage of perfection—so far, that is, as regards numbers shot in a given time—than in this country. The late Baron Hirsch organised and successfully carried out enormous shoots, netting birds from outlying estates and bringing them in to central beats. By this means, which may be described as largely artificial, and by the aid of a small army of between 200 and 300 drivers, he successfully presented to his assembled guests some very remarkable shooting. In the season of 1892, for example, on his St. Johann estates there were slain no less than 17,048 partridges, besides some thousands of hares, pheasants, and "various." This kind of thing, however, while it yields undoubtedly magnificent "gunning," can scarcely be classed as sport proper. It lacks, in truth, all those elements which contribute so much to the joys and delights of quiet partridge-shooting. There seems to me, somehow, a flavour of the showman's art in these holocausts of game.

The range of our British partridge (*Perdix cinerea*) is a very wide one, extending as it does from Scandinavia to Spain and southern Italy, while eastward the bird is found through Asia Minor and Persia as far even as the Altai Mountains of North-Central Asia.

One is often asked the weight of the common part-

ridge. From 12 to 13 ounces may be said to be about the average of a well-grown bird of the year in good condition. Occasional specimens will not infrequently exceed this weight, and there are records of birds attaining as much as 16 and 17 ounces. The average weight of a "Frenchman," or red-legged partridge, is from 16 to 18 ounces, and birds of this species have been shot which scaled as much as 22, 23, and even 25 ounces. A 25-ounce partridge is, even for a "Frenchman," an enormous bird. Such an one was, however, shot at Hanworth, in Norfolk, in or about the year 1881, and its claim to a record duly established.

From a photograph by C. Howard.

NEST AND EGGS OF RING-PLOVER: SUSSEX COAST.

PLATE XXIV.

CHAPTER XXIX

SPRING AND AUTUMN BY THE SHORE

Signs of spring—The ring-plover—Wheatears—Arrival of nightingales—A strange resting-place—Dunlin—Far migrants—Sandpipers and their kinsfolk—Turnstones—The grey plover—A day of perfection—Early autumn—Grey phalaropes—Shadows and reflections—Small shore birds—Curlew-sandpiper—Mallards—The black tern.

SPRING is upon the shore undoubtedly. You may tell it by a score of signs. Yonder elegant little ring-plover, running with dazzling feet into the remnants of the last wavelet that washed the smooth, tawny sand, displays it in the shining splendour of his breeding apparel. His grey-brown upper plumage, his neck-rings and head-markings, spotless under parts, orange feet and bill, both black-tipped, are all wonderfully perfect—immaculate. Just now he is restless, not caring to stay long upon the sands. His wife is nesting away yonder among the wide, barren stretch of sand and shingle, and he is off and away to join her. Few birds manage to conceal their eggs more cleverly from prying eyes than these little plovers, the drab, black-speckled colouring harmonising perfectly with the pebbles among which they are laid. In the eastern counties, where these birds nest often among the warrens by the shore, the ring-plover is known as the stone-hatch, manifestly for the reason that the hollow in which the eggs are laid is paved with small pebbles.

Away on the sea-wall of pebble yonder are a pair of brisk, alert wheatears, not long since arrived from the South and East—Egypt, Arabia, or Asia Minor. Wheatears always seem to me to be among the most cheerful of our feathered friends—a trifle fussy and fidgety, it is true, but apparently always in high spirits and upon good terms with themselves. A relative of our English wheatear, the imitative wheatear—the *schaapwachter* (shepherd) of the Boers of South Africa—is a great and deserved favourite in Cape Colony, where, close to the solitary farmhouse, perched on an anthill or some similar elevation, he pours forth his sweet, cheerful song and mimics—for he is a vastly imitative little fellow—all sorts of farmyard sounds—dogs barking, hens clucking, and so on. Like the English wheatear, as he flits hither and thither, he is constantly displaying the snow-white rump patch which distinguishes both these birds. Both species seem to be peculiarly tolerant of mankind. Our English bird never retreats very far away from anyone, and in South Africa, during one of the hard-fought battles of the Natal campaign, a *schaapwachter* was to be observed singing stoutly on his anthill and flitting hither and thither close to some of our troops, even amid the roar of a general action.

Two or three hundred yards behind the low, natural sea-wall, amid some straggling patches of briar and bush, which have acquired foothold here, you may hear the clear, delicious, liquid note of nightingales, which sing here during any hour of the day. These birds have been coming over for the last fortnight. This is a favourite resting-place of theirs, after their long flight across the sea, and from the middle of April one may be always certain of hearing and seeing one or two of them in this quiet spot. Occasionally, nightingales, like all other migrating birds, however

powerful their flight, suffer a good deal in their passage to England, and lie exhausted on the shore after their struggle with a baffling or contrary wind. On April 13th, 1872, for example, there were to be seen along the whole length of the Brighton sea-front nightingales under all the bathing-machines—surely the oddest resting-places in the world for birds concerning which so much poetry has been written, so much romance woven! No doubt these birds had reached the shore thoroughly exhausted, and were glad to avail themselves of the prosaic shelter even of the nearest bathing-machine.

The flights of dunlin—oxbirds, purres, sea-snipe, even bull's-eyes, country-folk locally call them—which have been so familiar along this quiet stretch of shore-line all the winter are away at last. They come to us towards September and leave in spring for their breeding-places in the far North—Scandinavia, Russia, Iceland, and elsewhere. Dunlin breed, too, on the wider moorlands of the north of England and Scotland, and from the circumstance that this bird frequents the same ground as, and is found nesting, as it were, side by side with, the golden plover, it has been called, rather neatly, "the plover's page." One is always sorry to lose the dunlins and glad to welcome them back to the shore-line again. Whatever other birds may be scarce along the sea margin during autumn and winter, these little dusky-brown waders, with their silvery waistcoats, are always with us. Their numbers seem never to decrease. In some estuaries you may see them by thousands, and their legions are often recruited by other small waders, such as pigmy curlew, knots, and even rarer visitants. A shot at a flock of dunlin will, in fact, as likely as not produce some totally unexpected bird treasure.

Although the dunlins, golden plovers, and hooded crows have deserted the shore-line this spring, we have some compensation for the loss of their company in the fleeting presence of other wanderers on their way north. No birds in the world make such astonishing migrations as the wading birds, and especially the sandpipers. The ancient, uncontrollable instinct which has impelled their ancestors during countless ages of the past, pushes them north each spring to their breeding-places, often far within the Arctic Circle, as regularly as clockwork and as certainly sends them flying far south again for the winter. From the southern shore-line of far South Africa, of South America, and other remote countries, come these restless wanderers on their spring flight, often dropping in on our English shores for a few days' rest before they reach that lone Ultima Thule where they are to find their mates and rear their families. The bar-tailed and black-tailed godwits, the whimbrel, little stint, curlew-sandpiper, common sandpiper, sanderling, nay, even the ruff and reeve, still annually pay our shore-line an occasional spring visit and pass on to those dim and unknown solitudes in which some overpowering impulse compels them to make their nests.

The quiet observer, spending a few days by some flat stretch of shore-line in springtime, especially if he carries with him a good pair of glasses, may not infrequently happen upon some of these birds. To-day, for instance, along yonder two miles of sand, have been noted sanderling, sandpipers, little stint, and turnstones, the latter most busily employed in lifting what seem almost incredible weights in search of food. A pair of these birds are often to be found manfully helping one another in some difficult piece of stone-raising. The dainty grey plover, which sometimes

favours us in spring and autumn, is, like the woodcock, a "here to-day, gone to-morrow" sort of bird. But the rare Kentish plover still haunts the lonelier parts of the coastline of Kent and Sussex, and, unlike his grey cousin, who *must* reach the far north of Asia, Russia, or America for his nesting business, brings up his interesting little family, like his near relative the ring-plover, on British soil, close to the shore. This bird is, I fancy, fairly often mistaken for the much commoner ring-plover; but its black legs easily distinguish it from the orange understandings of that bird. The neck collar, too, is incomplete in front.

There are certain rare days in spring, soft, balmy, perfect days, which bring an indefinite rapture to the senses; when one feels almost as if one could stretch forth one's hands and bless and embrace the soft breeze and the sweet atmosphere that touches one's cheek. This is surely one of them! The harsh winds have gone, spring is truly here, all nature seems to rejoice. The ring-plover has vanished, but yonder oyster-catcher, a hundred yards away, brave in his spring plumage, pied handsomely in black and white, with orange bill and purplish legs, sets the note of the season. It is manifest that he is courting, displaying himself in all his finery to the lady of his choice a few paces nearer the sea. He is a late arrival, I fancy, and has but recently addressed himself to his inamorata. The peewits are already nesting, and the male birds are tumbling and wheeling above the flat, green marsh meadows in that curious way of theirs, uttering penetrating cries that one can hear away over here by the still spring sea. The sky is pale blue; light westerly clouds sailing, miracles of fleecy whiteness, across the clear expanse; a nightingale trills fitfully in the black-thorn yonder, occasionally pouring forth those marvel-

lously liquid notes, yet never giving one quite as much as one hopes and wishes for; and, everywhere filling the whole quiet countryside with their music, skylarks are flinging themselves aloft, singing as only they sing for these few precious weeks of springtime.

A ramble by the shore in September or October, too, is almost certain to reward the observant lover of wild bird life, even in Sussex, with a sight of some interesting forms. Just at that time many of those far wanderers which breed within the Arctic Circle, and make their way south before the freezing winters of the North, light upon our shores. Some few, such as the knot and purple sandpiper, remain with us altogether for the cold season. Those charming little Arctic birds, the grey phalaropes, still, I am glad to say, touch upon some parts of the Sussex coast for a brief visit in the autumn, and may be noted by the observant eye. They belong to the great family of *Scolopacidæ*, or snipes, but have some of the characteristics of the grebes. The toes are lobed, and they are capital swimmers. The phalarope females are larger and more brightly coloured than the males, and appear in the breeding season to assume the principal share of the courting operations, even to the persecution of the at first sight indifferent male. During the winter they migrate as far south as India, Australia, and the coast of South America—a distant pilgrimage truly!

We had reached the shingly ridge of a certain quiet stretch of Sussex shoreland on a fine, clear September day. There was a fresh breeze from the west; the blue sky was chequered with light clouds, whose dark shadows cast fleeting yet lovely patches of violet and purple upon the sea before us. The tide was just going out and the band of brown sand gradually broadened, wet and gleaming at our feet, as the sea fell.

From a photograph by C. Howard.

NEST AND EGGS OF THE GREEN PLOVER: SUSSEX COAST.

PLATE XXV.

We sat for a quarter of an hour, until a little ridge of shingle and soft rock lay bare before us. As we expected, the plaintive whistle of some small shore birds fell presently upon our ears, and the flight, settling upon the further part of the ridge, began to feed. A certain youngster sitting at my side, fresh this season to the gun, was now burning to possess a specimen. I do not believe in the least in the indiscriminate slaying of shore birds, or indeed any other kind of feathered creature; but the shooting of a specimen now and again by a lad fond of natural history and anxious to skin and set up his own captures is pardonable enough; and so the boy picks up the breechloader and walks stealthily towards the birds, now, from their protective colouring, well-nigh invisible upon the patch of shingle. The Schultze cartridge cracks, and a brace of birds reward the ardent collector. These happen to be a dunlin and a ring-plover, charming little shore birds, both familiar residents upon our coasts, and, I am glad to say, common enough upon this particular portion of the Sussex sands. The dunlin is, of course, one of the commonest of our sandpipers. The ring-plover is found as far south as the Cape of Good Hope. Another British bird which, as I have shown elsewhere, migrates to South Africa is the curlew-sandpiper—sometimes known as the pigmy curlew—which I have procured along the same stretch of Sussex shoreland during September. The curlew-sandpiper, which undoubtedly nests somewhere within the Arctic Circle, enjoyed, with its cousin, the knot, until quite recently, the distinction of never yet having had its eggs discovered by naturalists.[1] The late Mr. Seebohm and

[1] The knot's nest and eggs have at length been discovered in the valley of the Yenesei. We still, however, lack much information concerning the breeding habits of this and others of this group.

other indefatigable collectors have hunted vigorously but unsuccessfully in the far North for the eggs of these and other migratory birds. Here, then, is a quest which appeals to the rising generation of discoverers in natural history.

But the sands are now showing wide and clear, and we resume our march. Flights of dunlin, ring-plovers, and little stints pass us occasionally. Little bands of the same birds are to be seen feeding greedily along the edge of the tide, running daintily about the wet sand, and getting up as we approach, to fly off with tender, plaintive little cries. We let them all go unscathed. The little stint, by the way, is another of the sandpipers which makes the astonishing migration from the Arctic Circle as far below the equator as South Africa. I have seen them in Cape Colony, Griqualand West, and Bechuanaland, and they are common enough at times throughout the whole country. The flight of the stints, as their white underparts flash to the sunlight, is, in the numerous bands in which they often move, very striking, when they all wheel and turn together.

Some way off along the sands are a couple of largish, dark-looking birds, which at a first casual glance we take for crows. No crows are these, however, as, at our nearer approach, they take flight, and with outstretched necks mount high upon the air, and, far out of shot, wheel seawards. They are a couple of mallards, birds which I never remember before to have seen feeding thus in broad daylight upon these sands. They are very wild, and, having made a wide and lofty sweep over the sea, they presently turn inland towards some dykes and marshland in our rear.

A broad and rather higher patch of sand away beyond is just now brilliantly flecked with scores of

gulls, which presently rise noisily and pass us on their way to the cliffs in which they shelter. Some few are within shot, but they are suffered to pass untouched. One more bird, a turnstone, we sight before setting our faces homeward. The bird is digging vigorously at some object—probably a sunken shell-fish—beneath the sand, and allows the youthful gunner to approach within forty paces. In the lad's eye this is a prize of value indeed. He is over-eager, and fires hurriedly, and I am not surprised to see the bird go off unhurt. The turnstone is another of the wanderers from the North which touch our littoral in spring and autumn, fare far southward for the winter, and are well known on South African shores.

Not long before we quit the sands and strike inland we note a single whitish bird, just upon the edge of the now rising tide. We approach nearer, and I see that it is a tern—sea-swallows they are more often called by the long-shore folks. But it is a tern with which I am not familiar. I take the gun. Perhaps I am wrong, but the flesh of the collector is weak, and it is a hard thing to let a new and apparently unknown bird go unidentified. At length the tern rises lightly upon those sharp and sweeping wings and wheels off. A single shot brings it down into the shallow surf, whence it is rapidly retrieved by the eager lad at my side. Here, then, is the rarest bird of the morning ramble, a young bird of the year of the black tern. The dark colouring assumed by these birds is only beginning to show upon the upper plumage, the breast is pure snow-white. An interesting prize this, not commonly seen upon the Sussex shore. The black tern is not the least remarkable of this most elegant family of sea-birds, and belongs to the small group known as marsh terns. Formerly this bird bred freely

in Britain, but is now better known as a spring and autumn visitant than a resident of these islands. Wrapping the prize carefully in a handkerchief for future dissection, we reluctantly quit the shore and its manifold delights, scramble across the shingle, and strike inland.

CHAPTER XXX

WILD LIFE ON THE SUSSEX DOWNS

Beauties of the downs—Gorse—Linnæus and his tears—Wheatears and their ways—Method of capture—Saved by a wheatear pie—Cape wheatears—Winchats, stonechats, and other birds—The dotterel—"Playing the ape"—Landrail in flight—A great landrail year—Peregrines—How they are harried—Egg plunderers—The bereaved falcon and her new mate—Jackdaws and choughs—Down foxes—An old huntsman—Cuckmere Haven—Flower life—Effects of clouds and sunshine.

IT matters not at all at what time of year your rambles may take you upon the smooth maritime hills of Sussex; if you are a lover of nature and of wild life, there will be always something to repay you. Spring, summer, and autumn have their peculiar and especial beauties, but I have known many a winter's day that held scenes and incidents of extraordinary attraction. Spring, of course, renewing her youth after so many a thousand years, has a charm that nothing can quite equal. That wonderful and mysterious suggestion of a new and fresh existence which, borne upon the soft April air, brings something of the pleasure of youth even to the jaded soul of the town-dweller, loses, you may be sure, nothing of its ineffable sweetness on the fresh and breezy down heights. A hundred signs tell the wanderer—if he has anything of observation in his nature—that spring is indeed truly here. Yonder covert of gorse, for instance, arrayed so magnificently on the stretching slope and shoulder of the downside, is just

now in the fullest blaze of its golden glory. To appreciate gorse bloom in its most perfect beauty, one must see it displayed in this way. Gorse lends itself so deftly to the soft contours of these heights and their valleys; even in winter its dark masses add a wonderful charm to the spreading slopes. In the full flower of springtime there are surely few things more beautiful in nature. Not even a wild hillside of southern Cape Colony, flushed with the colours of a hundred varieties of heath, can easily surpass it. Linnæus, they say, setting eyes for the first time on a stretch of English gorse-land, arrayed in its spring beauty, burst into tears. The tears of that great man—implying, perhaps, some excess of what our great-grandparents termed sensibility—may surely be pardoned on such an occasion. The view over a wide and beautiful landscape has much the same effect upon many natures, though English reserve is usually a check upon the outward display of strong emotion.

Springtime upon the downs brings always many a welcome feathered wanderer from southern and eastern countries. In March or early April, for example, you may be always certain to set eyes on the lively and handsome wheatear, which, having wintered in Egypt, Asia Minor, Arabia, or some other warm region, betakes himself in spring as far north as Iceland and even the unattractive shores of Greenland. Last year (1903) this bird seemed to me later than usual, and although one or two were noted by the second week in March, there were very few about till the 25th of that month.

The wheatear, until a score or two of years since, was in great request as an article of food. Gourmets thought as much of this bird almost as of the quail and ortolan, and for centuries shepherds of the Sussex

downs made quite a considerable addition to their scant wages by snaring these restless little creatures. The snare consisted of a sod or two of down-turf so arranged that the inquisitive bird could run underneath, with a horsehair noose fixed to a peg at either end. For some reason or other, the wheatear was in the habit of betaking himself to these shelters when clouds obscured the sun or when storms drove up. It was surely a foolish credulity that induced him to accept so dangerous a haven. In the good days—say towards the end of the eighteenth century—enormous numbers of these birds were snared in various parts of the South Downs. Near Eastbourne, for instance, 1,840 dozen were captured in a single season. A shepherd would set fifty or sixty traps and expect to get a bird to each during the course of the day. At the current price of a penny per wheatear he did very well; but then the harvest was a very short one. Wheatears, by the way, never flock, and even in the days when they were plentiful more than four or six were seldom seen at once. It was the custom among Eastbourne and other folk of the down villages in those days, when they wanted a dozen or so of wheatears, to visit the shepherds' snares, take what they required, and leave a penny in each trap by way of fee. There are still many Sussex men who understand wheatear trapping perfectly well, and have snared hundreds of these birds. I was talking to a down shepherd a year or so since, who told me he had only given up the practice some five years before. Latterly he had been getting 4*s*. per dozen for his catches, but 2*s*. per dozen would be a fair price twenty years ago. Another shepherd informed me that fourteen years before he used to take four or five dozen in a day, usually about the time of wheat harvest. At this time, shortly before their

autumn migration, the birds were at their best and fattest.

In Cromwell's time Squire Wilson, Lord of the Manor of Eastbourne, was suspected of being in communication with the Royalists, and a lieutenant with a troop of horse was suddenly sent to arrest him and search his house. The squire was upstairs ill of the gout, and his sharp-witted spouse set down the lieutenant and his men to a choice repast, in which a huge wheatear pie figured conspicuously. While they were engaged on this and other good things, the squire upstairs had time to burn his papers, and so, thanks to the excellence of the wheatear pie, escaped any unpleasant consequences.

Wheatears at the present day are certainly far less common than they used to be on the South Downs; it is possible that the Wild Birds Protection Acts, which have during the last few years put an end to the old custom of trapping, may have some effect in restoring their numbers. I believe, however, that a change of migration has taken place during the last seventy years, and these birds are now probably much more numerous than they used to be in some other parts of Europe. The wheatear is decidedly an imitative bird. It has a pleasant little song of its own, but it will occasionally mimic the lark and other birds. All the wheatears certainly have distinct tendencies towards the art of the mime; I have already mentioned the *schaapwachter* of the Boers of South Africa; another Cape species, *Saxicola bifasciata*, is also a great imitator of birds and beasts.

The whinchat usually reappears on the downs towards the end of the first week in April. The early part of the spring of 1903 being a very mild and a very forward one, the forerunners were somewhat earlier, and

From a photograph by C. Howard.

SEAGULL'S NEST: BEACHY HEAD.

PLATE XXVI.

I saw one for the first time on Sunday, March 15th.[1] These cheerful little birds, with their pleasing song, are always welcome additions to our down population in the time of spring. I like to see them bustling about the gorse coverts during the nesting season, and it is very pretty to watch them hawking flies, as they will do, from some convenient branch. The stonechat, a cousin of the last-named bird, and indeed of the wheatears also, is another migrant that always returns to us with spring. Some few pairs of these birds, unlike the whinchats, which completely desert us, remain on the coast throughout the winter, and may be seen upon the slopes at the foot of Beachy Head, and about the western end of the Eastbourne Parade, enjoying the winter sunshine and flitting about the shingle. The male of this species, especially in his full breeding plumage, is a singularly handsome little creature, with his ruddy breast, velvety, jet-black head, and white collar. They are by no means shy birds, and will often allow one to approach within a few yards. The stonechat is a far wanderer over the face of the earth, penetrating to South and West Africa, Palestine, Asia Minor, Persia, India, and Japan. It has been observed by Mr. Harting and other naturalists that the winter change of plumage in this bird, as in the wheatear, is due not to a moult of feathers, but to an actual change of the feather colouration.

The various warblers, which visit us so numerously in spring, are seldom seen upon the open downs, but are to be found about every grove and copse lying in the sheltered bottoms of these great hills. Linnets and

[1] The spring migration was checked by three weeks of cold north-westerly winds, and the main body of the spring birds did not appear till Sunday, 26th April, when the wind had shifted to the south-west and rain fell.

redpoles at certain seasons are plentiful, as are yellow-hammers. The cirl-bunting is a rare and shy visitant, but, especially about the gorse-clad valleys, he is occasionally to be seen. The corn-bunting, with his screeching cry, is, of course, familiar. Larks are by far the most numerous bird inhabitants of the South Downs; in spring they are extraordinarily abundant, and the whole air seems to be filled with their sweet song. In no part of England are the skylark and its song to be appreciated so completely as upon the vast free spaces of this high open country. At one time or another an infinity of small birds—wagtails, pipits, tits, and others—are to be noted in various parts of the down country. I have no space in which even to enumerate them.

One of our rarest visitants is, I think, the grasshopper warbler, which I have heard and seen only once or twice upon the downs. The curious shrill, whirring note from which this bird takes its name is quite unmistakable, and once heard can never be forgotten. It is quite unlike the note of any other small bird, and has been said to have been mistaken by an Ayrshire rustic for the warning noise of a rattlesnake, though why a rattlesnake should have been imagined in the peaceful wilds of Burns's country is not explained. This is quite a small bird, little larger than the sedge-warbler, which it somewhat resembles.

Among the more notable birds of the downs, one of the rarest is certainly the dotterel, which seventy or eighty years ago was comparatively common in this country, so much so as to be reckoned in some localities among birds of sport. One of the handsomest of the plover family, this bird, with its lower breast of dull orange, separated from the brown upper breast by a gorget of white, the head strikingly marked in black,

white, and grey, with white throat and cheeks, olive-brown upper colouring, and black stomach, is nowadays, for various reasons, very scarce in Britain. It has been reduced from its former plenty, partly in the way of sport, partly for its plumage, which fly-fishers prize highly, and latterly for the simple reason that it is a scarce creature. This plover, which winters in Palestine and North Africa, still appears sparingly in England towards April and May, and from thence till early June is occasionally to be noted. Each spring a few dotterel alight upon the South Downs, and, especially during May, are to be observed by the sharp-eyed lover of nature. Such an observer of nature must, however, be abroad early and often at this season, if he wishes to set eyes upon this handsome but somewhat foolish plover.

These birds occasionally appear with us on their return migration in September and October. I saw a pair while riding on the downs above Eastbourne only last October.

The dotterel has always had a reputation for silliness; its very name is the diminutive of dotard, and a doting foolishness is certainly a characteristic of this too confiding creature. No bird is more unsuspicious or more easily shot. In the days when our forefathers netted their game, the fowlers laid it to the charge of this bird that he even played the fool in close contact with the deadly net. Bacon says of him, "In catching of dotterels we see how the foolish bird playeth the ape in gesture." Probably the poor silly creature was merely feinting and tumbling in the air, as some of the plovers—even the wary green species—will do, especially during the nesting season. I count it among my choicest spring pleasures upon the downs to have set eyes upon this rare bird in this region. The dotterel

still nests in Scotland, but the great majority of them breed in North Europe, Siberia, and other remote places. Among other plovers, the golden plover and peewit are familiar to down folk.

Hares, rabbits, and partridges are all plentiful upon the downs. There is a certain slope, lying between one range of down and another, which I occasionally cross. It lies secluded, and is always covered with long grass—much like the veldt grass of South Africa—and here one is almost certain of putting up partridges or landrail. Last September, crossing this thick, pale yellow grass, in a very strong wind, I came so suddenly upon a landrail that in sheer terror he was driven out of his usual running, creeping habit and forced to take wing. He swept off down wind like a partridge, and, borne away upon the gale, was quickly out of sight. I never quite realised till that moment how well this bird can fly—if he likes. And, indeed, the landrail must be a bird of fair flight to compass the enormous distances that he accomplishes by sea and land. He is quite one of the most determined travellers in the world, moving as he does during his spring and autumn migrations over more than half the world. It is astonishing how a bird of such running habits and apparently such feeble flight can undertake such wanderings. The unquenchable spirit of migration is, surely, one of the most wonderful and, thus far, the most mysterious and inexplicable things in all nature. We have, from time to time, various explanations offered us; none of them seem really satisfactory. The fact is the impulses and beginnings of this instinct are clean lost in the æons upon æons of time that have elapsed since first these creatures began their journeyings.

Landrails vary very much in numbers in different years. During the season of 1898 they were, I think,

more numerous in certain parts of England than they have been for several generations. In one field of clover in East Sussex—a twelve-acre piece—the late Sir Anchitel Ashburnham's sons shot, in the course of a fortnight, no less than fifty of these birds—an extraordinary record; and Sir Anchitel stated that in fifty-three seasons of shooting he had never known landrail so plentiful. At about the same time (September 8th) three gunners in Glamorganshire shot seven brace of these birds in a single day.

Upon the same down walk in which I put up this strong-flying landrail—not a quarter of an hour before—a pair of peregrine falcons came overhead, passing so close to me that if I had had a gun and the inclination, I could have secured a very easy right and left. These noble raptorial birds still breed, I am pleased to say, in one or two parts of the Sussex cliffs, and are not infrequently to be seen during a walk along the high sea-margin or over the downs. Occasionally their eyries are so placed—they do not now nest in the same spot each year—as to be nearly inaccessible; so at least I gather from the reports of certain coastguards in the vicinity. But, more often than not, their nests are rifled each season of the young birds. It is a pity that these splendid creatures cannot be left alone for a few years, to perpetuate their species and raise up a stronger population among one of the scarcest birds of our islands. Unfortunately there are always at hand the greedy and too often utterly unprincipled collector of eggs, or the hawking man, desirous of procuring young falcons for his sport, to tempt those poor folk who happen to know of these nests and have the pluck to go over the cliff after them. I happen to know something of one of these men. He gets about a sovereign apiece for the young peregrines, and supplies

them to hawking men. There are, by the way, many more people hawking in this country than there were thirty or forty years ago. It is pleasant to know that this fine old English sport still maintains its existence, and I have every sympathy with its devotees. In fact I look upon hawking, which I have had the pleasure of witnessing occasionally, as one of our most interesting field sports, far more worthy of the name than, for instance, modern pheasant-shooting. Still, though one may be in complete sympathy with the needs of the falconer, one draws the line when the eyrie of a Sussex peregrine has to be robbed for the falconer's behoof. Our peregrines are really too few to be thus ill-treated, and I was by no means sorry when I heard, a year or two back, that the nest-plunderer aforesaid had failed in his object. He had a commission for young peregrines from a certain falconer, and made a journey to the cliff for the purpose of getting down to the eyrie. The wind was so high, however, that he found it impossible to effect his purpose, and I believe, for that year, at all events, the peregrine parents managed to rear their young.

Few facts in natural history are more remarkable than that concerning the peregrine falcon and her mate. If, by unhappy chance—the gunshot of some rabid collector or gamekeeper, for example—she is bereft of her mate, the tiercel, as falconers call him, she quits her usual haunt and sails away into space. How or where she picks up a fresh husband it is impossible to say, but in a few days she reappears with a fresh mate, and is to be seen wheeling on strong pinion about her ancestral places. In the case of a British falcon thus bereaved, she will probably make her way straight to Iceland, or Scandinavia, or some other part of wild north Europe, seek out her choice and bring him back

with her. The instinct is very wonderful, and the tremendous journey thus accomplished is usually made in a marvellously short space of time. In the case of the peregrine the female is the bigger and more powerful bird than the male; she is, beyond doubt, the master, and it is possible that in these wanderings in search of a husband some amount of compulsion, as well as affection, is employed in bringing the new mate to British shores. Peregrines, true aristocrats that they are, are the greatest conservatives in the world. They use the same nesting-place generation after generation, and their eyries have been familiar to local observers for centuries.[1] Of all birds of the South Downs they are to me the most interesting. They are by no means uncommon. I have seen a pair more than once soaring about the cliff at Holywell, on the outskirts of Eastbourne, and not seldom while crossing the downs I have come across them; evidences of their kills, the feathers of a slain woodpigeon, or even a partridge, are not infrequent.

Other *Falconidæ* of the downs are the kestrel, to be seen commonly, the sparrow-hawk occasionally, and the hobby very rarely. Once, at least, within the last eight years, a pair of hen harriers nested and reared their young in a wild stretch of gorse with which I am acquainted. This I take to be a very rare occurrence in these parts, and I should have certainly doubted the fact if I had not witnessed it with my own eyes. These birds are decidedly rare in this neighbourhood, though they may be seen occasionally on the adjacent marshes of Pevensey and elsewhere.

Among cliff denizens, gulls and jackdaws are, of course, always in evidence. Both are very common.

[1] Where, however, as in the Sussex cliffs, they are constantly harried, they will occasionally shift their nesting-places.

Vast colonies of jackdaws are to be found, and their shrill cries are seldom long absent. Amusing as these birds often are, I have a sentimental grievance against them in that they are chiefly answerable for the disappearance of that interesting bird, the chough, from these parts. A hundred years ago this curious crow, with its curved orange-red bill and red legs, used to build in our southern chalk cliffs, especially near Dover, but was, so tradition avers, driven out by the noisy and aggressive jackdaw. Here and there the chough still maintains a precarious existence in various parts of Britain. Probably it is most numerous at the present day in the sea-cliffs of Clare Island, in Clew Bay, off the coast of county Mayo.

Down below the cliffs the cormorant is occasionally to be noted, as well as the turnstone, oyster-catcher, and other shore birds. Occasionally, but not very often, a seal will come ashore; these must be far wanderers from other parts of the coast. In the autumn of 1902 a seal actually put ashore on the shingly beach of Eastbourne, not far from opposite the Grand Hotel. Not liking the look of the place and its inhabitants, he straightway went off to sea again, a wise precaution, or he would most certainly have been speedily put to death.

Among the vast stretches of gorse which add so much to the beauty of the down country plenty of foxes are to be found. Foxhounds are often upon the hills, and draw for them regularly, and occasionally good runs are had with them. What with convenient cliff ledges, of which the cunning beasts avail themselves, and open earths, these animals have, however, somewhat the best of it. Still they are pretty often killed. One is sorry to see the fine grey English foxes perceptibly fewer than they used to be. They are magnificent

fellows, and, really, as I have watched a particularly fine specimen driven out of the covert from which he is so difficult to dislodge, he has appeared almost more like a wolf than an English fox. Unhappily French foxes have been turned down freely in some places within the last few years. These are smaller, much redder in colour, and show nothing like such good sport. They are short-running brutes, dodging from covert to covert, and seldom giving a real good chase. I am convinced that in very many parts of England fox-hunting has suffered greatly from these foreign importations. I suppose the thing became necessary —it is one of the misfortunes of over-civilisation and the artificial state of modern sport—but it is, I think, certain that our stout English breed has to a great extent been ruined, and that at the present time foxes show nothing like the great runs they used to do. It is true that foxhounds may be faster than they used to be, but even making due allowance for that, the fact remains—and every middle-aged hunting man knows it —that it is the exception nowadays to get the fine runs of the good days of fox-hunting.

I first saw fox-hunting on the Sussex downs many years ago with the late Charles Shepherd, for nearly forty years huntsman to Lord Leconfield's hounds. He was surely one of the cheeriest and heartiest of huntsmen, a real good man at his work, and quite one of the old school. I well remember as a lad scrambling on one's pony about the huge slopes of Chanctonbury, and the fine country adjacent, with Shepherd's cheery voice ringing sharp upon the clear down air. He died in March, 1903, in his eighty-seventh year, having hunted hounds up to, I think, his seventy-ninth or eightieth year—a great achievement. In his youth Shepherd, who came from the Rufford country, must

have known and hunted with many sportsmen born far back in the eighteenth century. He will be remembered by those who have hunted with him for at least another forty or fifty years. A real link with the past!

Foxes upon the Sussex downs have plenty of good feeding. Rabbits, their favourite food, are abundant and always at hand. Poultry, by way of pleasant change, are, of course, not difficult to be obtained at the various farmhouses and villages nestling in the hollows and among the shoulders of these hills. But foxes do not disdain fish, and both they and their cousins, the jackals, in maritime districts undoubtedly pick up many a dainty along the shore. They will devour beetles freely, especially, as the famous master of hounds, Tom Smith, declared, in the neighbourhood of the New Forest. Young lambs in the down country —and indeed in most countries—require careful looking after, although it is probable that far more sheep and lambs are killed by the fox's first cousin, the dog, than by the fox himself. Badgers are well-known inhabitants of these regions, and the otter, found in the Cuckmere and other streams, was last season, for the first time within the memory of man, hunted in this part of Sussex.

Between Birling Gap and Seaford lies the Cuckmere Haven, where the little river of that name discharges itself into the sea. Years ago this used to be a favourite locality for smugglers and wildfowl. The smugglers have gone, and the wildfowl are sadly reduced in numbers; but near the estuary and up the marshy valley towards the old-fashioned village of Alfriston some interesting shore birds are, especially in hard winters, to be met with. The Cuckmere threads its way into the sea at low water in a small but most pellucid current through a bed of shingle. To me

From a photograph by J. Coster.

PLATE XXVII.

CUCKMERE HAVEN.

the stream at this point looks most tempting for sea-trout and even an occasional salmon. I know that sea-trout are sometimes taken in the neighbouring river, the Avon, which flows to the sea by Lewes and Newhaven, but I am not aware of any modern fisherman having landed a Cuckmere sea-trout. Probably the stream is too easy-going and placid—too midland-looking—to attract game fish of this species.

Within the limits of this chapter it is impossible to attempt more than the mere outline of so vast a subject. Even a stout volume would be no more than sufficient to do justice to the wild life of the South Downs. I must pass over the bats, the lizards, mice, voles, and other small mammals, as well as scores of birds, many of them of much more than fleeting interest. As for the wild flowers, who that has wandered upon the downs can ever forget them? They need many chapters, or articles to themselves. Nature is wonderfully bountiful of flower life amid the smooth, short turf and broken spaces of these ancient hills. I have sat on a June day on these pleasant heights and within a radius of five yards have noted fragrant patches of young wild thyme, the greater and lesser tormentil, "eggs and bacon," or as some call it, "Lady's slipper," the small down buttercup, viper's bugloss, with its lovely blue, milkwort, marjoram, a veronica, with tiny flowers of a tender lavender, the cowslip, the speedwell of the "darling blue," creamy meadow-sweet tinged with the most tender pink, the rich yellow St. John's wort, and the wild burnet rose of the downs, trailing its broad white blossom over a neighbouring patch of gorse, which, itself, still showed bloom here and there. That is, surely, a goodly list for so small a space! In spring the tiny draba, with its white blooms gleaming like frost-rime upon every mound, is

almost the first flower to catch the eye. Pimpernel of two kinds, in blue and scarlet, veronicas, to which our intimate friend the blue speedwell belongs, linarias, campanulas, and many another flower appear to gladden the eye of the passer-by. They say, by the way, that since Buxbaum's speedwell, a little blue-and-white striped species, was introduced into this country, the turtle-dove, which feeds much upon the seeds of this plant, has become perceptibly more plentiful. I saw no less than eight of these doves together in one patch of seeds on the downs last summer, a number which struck me as very remarkable. Buxbaum's speedwell came in quite accidentally, with Italian rye grass, a generation or two since. In May the cowslips are wonderful—whole downsides are clothed with them.

A plant, unknown in almost every other part of England, yet familiar upon these chalk downs, is the round-headed rampion, notable for its handsome dark blue flower. The wild orchids are in themselves a fascinating study among the quiet hills. A score of kinds may be discovered within a range of half as many miles, if the searcher knows how and where to find them. Among these are the spotted, fragrant, and pyramidal orchis, the tway-blade, the lady's tress, the bee, the early purple, the green-winged meadow orchis, and the frog orchis. Among the rarer kinds, some of them very local and very hard to lay hands upon—luckily for themselves, poor things—are the butterfly orchis, the fly, the bird's nest, and the helleborine orchis.

In truth, the wild life of the South Downs is an inexhaustible subject. Whether the wanderer over these free and invigorating spaces, with their magnificent prospects and their ample air, be a lover of bird, or beast, or flower, here, assuredly, he will find enough

to amuse and interest him for weeks and months—nay, one may say for years together. Once you have made a friend of the South Downs—and they grow upon you amazingly—you will never tire of them. They are friends whose faces are always the same, ever offering to you a disinterested and a most genuine greeting. On a clear day of summer the various cloud effects, racing over the vast countryside, near and far, are in themselves an inexhaustible study in colour. The various shades and gradations are countless, as you will discover, once you begin to put them down in black and white. The interchange of sunshine and shadow upon these smooth heights is, indeed, among the most beautiful of the many beautiful things that nature has here to offer you.

CHAPTER XXXI

SNIPE

Sufferings during hard weather—Rapid recovery—Three kinds of British snipe—Pleasures of snipe-shooting—Sport in Ireland—English water meadows—Foreign shooting—"Drumming of the snipe"—Mr. Boyes' observations—Migrations of British snipe—Nesting-places—Snipe in South Africa—The common snipe not found there—A pardonable mistake—Sport with African snipe—Snipe as table birds.

DURING hard weather no bird suffers more than the snipe. Their soft, wet feeding-grounds are frozen hard and covered with snow, the springs and runnels are ice-bound, and the birds, if the frost holds for long, perish in hundreds. They lose their condition as quickly as they renew it again, and in a hard and prolonged frost the sufferings of these dainty sporting birds are intense. Their food—worms, larvæ, and minute shellfish—is only to be procured by boring with those long bills with which nature has expressly provided them, and with every spot of moist, boggy soil iron-bound by frost, as it is in a very hard winter, the birds are quickly starved to death and die miserably.

If the frost is not too hard, snipe usually rely upon these soft spots, the banks and beds of running streams, and the neighbourhood of springs, as places of sanctuary and refreshment, when the more open bogs and marshes are gripped by the hard weather. It has often been observed that snipe resort to turnip fields during a period of frost. Their instinct tells them that the light moisture frozen upon the leaves of these

plants yields readily to the morning sun, even in hard weather, and that the drippings beneath render the soil there, at all events, temporarily soft. Here, then, is another place of safety in all but the very severest weather. But in some of those terrible winters which occasionally visit these islands, even these last resorts of the destitute snipe are ice-bound. Then their sufferings begin. Perhaps even the very estuaries and saltings, whither they often repair when near the coast, refuse them sustenance; the ice-king has gripped the very seashore itself. Then, as we have said, snipe die in hundreds, and even thousands. Their dead bodies when picked up will at such times be found to be mere morsels of feathers, skin, and bone.

It is astonishing, on the other hand, with what marvellous quickness these birds recover from the dire starvation of a frost. The frozen places yield to the thaw, worms and other succulent food are found near the surface, and snipe and woodcock, and other boring birds, revel in a rich food-supply, which restores to them flesh and fat in an incredibly short space of time. The digestive process of these boring birds is wonderfully organised, and in four or five days the snipe, which before the yielding of the frost was a mere bag of feathered bones, will have become, as if by magic, a plump, well-conditioned bird, abundantly provided with fat, and affording the most delicious and succulent eating.

Three kinds of snipe are familiar to sportsmen in these islands: the common or full snipe, which weighs, in good condition, some four ounces; the tiny jack-snipe, weighing little more than two ounces; and the double or great snipe, sometimes called the solitary snipe—the scarcest of the three species—which will weigh as much as eight, nine, or even ten ounces.

The common snipe breeds, in certain chosen localities, pretty freely in Britain, and is towards November recruited by vast flights of the same species, which arrive from Northern Europe, and, spreading over the country, settle themselves temporarily in those moist, marshy haunts to which during ages of the past their ancestors have resorted during the winter season.

There are, as all snipe-shooters know, certain favourite haunts, sometimes of the smallest dimensions, which snipe are certain to revisit with unfailing punctuality year after year. On the other hand, their appearances and disappearances often take place with the most baffling irregularity. To-day a snipe bog may teem with birds; to-morrow when you visit the same place the flight has vanished, and but a few odd birds remain. Snipe in themselves are probably the most reliable and unfailing barometers in the world, and are, by their wonderful instinct and organisation, able to tell exactly changes of weather, the approach of which is quite unknown to human beings, as well as to many of the mammals and birds. Neither the jack-snipe nor the double snipe breeds in Britain or Ireland. The jack-snipe, for some unaccountable reason, is growing much scarcer than formerly in many localities, and this in spite of the fact that where common snipe are fairly plentiful the tiny "jack" is often, from his diminutive size, allowed to go free. The jack-snipe is a plump, delicious little bird, but so small as to be really scarcely worth the bagging. The double snipe, on the contrary, is an important and most delicious table bird, weighing just twice as much as the common species. He is usually over-fat, sluggish, and not very difficult to bring down. Unfortunately in this country the appearances of this magnificent snipe are so rare that few gunners, even

From a photograph by Major H. Moore.

NEST OF SNIPE.

PLATE XXVIII.

among those constantly engaged in snipe-shooting, can reckon upon seeing single specimens more than once or twice in three or four seasons. There are not a few sportsmen who have killed fair numbers of common snipe or jack-snipe without having had the luck to bag their "double" cousin, the great snipe.

Few forms of gunning are more delightful than snipe-shooting. The suddenness with which these birds so unexpectedly present themselves; the twisting difficulties of their flight; the knowledge that they will rise sometimes within easy shot, at another just beyond range; the shrill cry, in itself somewhat unsteadying, with which the bird springs up from its boggy resting-place—all these things tend to make snipe-shooting one of the most painfully delightful of all forms of sport. Upon some days the birds will get up in the pleasantest fashion possible, one after the other rising from the bog within easy shot, and affording each time a fair chance to the sportsman. Another day they are exasperating even to madness, getting up just beyond reach, twisting and shifting upon the wing in such a fashion that old hands even will miss more than half their shots, and lose alike their patience and their temper. One day they are here in a heap, the next they have sailed elsewhere. You never know quite how to take these shifty, unaccountable little creatures. Yet, as the devoted snipe-shooter well knows, there is no species of game, spite of these and other drawbacks, which continues to offer, year in, year out, so constant a fascination to its pursuers. Calmness and control of nerves are above all things to be studied in snipe-shooting; the hurried, the over-eager, and the nervous gunner is more than ordinarily handicapped when in pursuit of the wily snipe.

For the perfection of snipe-shooting we must seek

the sister isle. Ireland, with its bogs, its vast areas of waste and undrained land, and its scant population, is the true British home of this bird. Of course there are even yet many parts of England and Scotland where fair snipe-shooting is to be obtained. But to secure with certainty a good bag of these feathered dainties the gunner will undoubtedly be wise if he betakes himself to the bogs of Erin. Within recent years excellent bags have been made in Ireland, and the sport in favourable localities and in good weather may still be classed as first-rate. In the summer of 1820 a gunner of the old school, shooting in that favoured island with a flint gun of the period, bagged no less than 1,310 snipe to his own gun. In more recent times—1880—a single gunner, Captain R. Denny, shot 681 to his own gun during nine weeks' sport, a great record. The birds breed still in many parts of England. You may find them, for instance, even in the driest summers, along the drains and rivulets upon the grassy slopes of the Derbyshire hills; but the great migration of snipe which annually replenishes our shooting supply comes to us from North Europe in November and December.

If you possess snipe-shooting over the water meadows of some flat, sluggish river, in the quieter and less highly drained parts of England, you may on a mild morning of December, when rain is in the air, be pretty sure to find the birds lying closely. As you expected, you have gone no very great way along the stream before you have flushed and brought down your first couple, which Donna, the spaniel, now helps you to secure. A right and left at snipe is, by the way, no mean feat. Pursuing the winter's walk, quite a fair show of birds rise out of shot in some long wet grass ahead. They fly no great way, and now as you watch

you note with pleasure these snipe alighting by the corner of a woodland, where you can approach them down wind. Of all our English sporting birds the snipe, unquestionably, is the most bothering to the gunner. Some men, capital shots at partridge, grouse, pheasant, and wild duck, can never successfully acquire the trick of hitting them. Perhaps the best suggestion one can make to the unaccustomed gunner is to take an Irish shooting and spend a winter in following these perplexing birds over the swamps and fens of "bog-land." Practice, which a man cannot always get in England, is the only means of overcoming the preliminary difficulty in hitting snipe. In India, South Africa, China, Japan, and the Mediterranean excellent snipe-shooting is to be obtained with little expense. There snipe-shooting is pursued under warmer and more cheerful conditions than at home.

The little jack-snipe is reckoned by many sportsmen the most difficult shooting of the three species found in Britain, and it is an odd fact that this diminutive bird will, instead of flying right away, pitch again in the same bog or field within easy distance of the shooter and suffer itself to be fired at time after time. There is a ludicrous tale in an old sporting work concerning a former quartermaster of the 64th Regiment, who was stationed in Ireland, and a certain jack-snipe, which he had flushed and fired at many times without success. This gentleman—a Mr. Molloy—was an enthusiastic gunner, but by no means a good shot. "Regularly after his duty was done," says my authority, "or if he could possibly obtain leave for a day, he used to equip himself for shooting, and always sprung this jack-snipe, at which he fired and followed; and the bird used to pitch so close to him at times that he was confident he had shot it, and used to run to take it up, when, to his

great surprise, it would rise and fly a little further. He actually acknowledged he fired one day eighteen times at the bird, and after shooting at it for the whole season, he happened to be crossing the bog it lay in, when he put it up, and exclaiming, 'There's my old friend!' threw his stick at it and killed it on the spot. Whenever after any of his brother officers found a jack-snipe they were always sure to say, 'There goes Quartermaster Molloy!'"

It is not often nowadays that all three kinds of snipe are shot in a single field, or on a small patch of fen, but in the month of October, 1901, on a bog of about an acre in extent on the estate of Glenlair, Dalbeattie, Kirkudbrightshire, a common snipe, a jack-snipe, and a double or solitary snipe were all shot in one day.

The well-known "drumming" of the snipe and its cause have, I suppose, given rise to as much theory and as many differences of opinion as any phenomenon in the natural history of birds. Some few years ago much discussion took place concerning this habit in the pages of the *Field* newspaper. One of the most interesting and, to my mind, convincing letters was contributed by Mr. F. Boyes, of Beverley, a well-known naturalist and sportsman and a most keen observer. This letter so coincides with my own impressions and observations that I append it.

"In the correspondence which has taken place in your columns respecting the 'drumming' of the snipe, it has appeared to me that your contributors have confused the vocal notes of the bird with that most peculiar sound which it makes by the aid of its tail and wings. What is known to naturalists as the 'drumming' or 'bleating' of the snipe is that sound which the bird makes when on the wing and whilst it is descending rapidly and obliquely through the air. Let me describe the 'drumming' of the snipe. We enter

GEORGIAN SNIPE-SHOOTING.
(From an old print.)

PLATE XXIX.

the marsh, and before we have gone very far we become conscious of a series of clicking sounds, like 'jick-juck,' 'jick-juck,' 'jick-juck,' rapidly repeated, which apparently proceed from some creature on the ground. We follow these up, and as we draw near, what should rise just in front of us but a veritable common snipe, which, after flying some distance, rises up in the air uttering the same peculiar notes which first attracted our attention! As we watch it rising upward it is repeating these vocal notes all the time, but after attaining a sufficient altitude, it suddenly turns, and with wings shaking or trembling, and tail widely spread, the feathers of which seem to be turned somewhat sideways and are distinctly seen to be vibrating, the bird shoots rapidly and obliquely downwards for some distance, and it is then—whilst it is making this sudden swoop—that the peculiar sound called 'drumming' is heard. Those who have heard this peculiar sound in the distance, say, on a still summer's evening, with the birds in the sky invisible, may well be excused for likening the sounds to the bleating of a lamb on some distant upland. That the sound is produced by the vibration of the feathers in their rapid passage through the air is unquestionable, for a similar sound can be produced by striking a boy's thin wooden sword rapidly downward, the resistance of the air causing it to vibrate and give out a peculiar sound similar in tone to that of the bird; and those who have spent much time in the marshes must have heard at one time or another the wind playing through the broad-leaved sedges, and, catching a leaf at a particular angle, make it produce a sound of a like character. I need scarcely say the 'drumming' is never produced except when the bird is on the wing and descending, but the vocal sounds 'tinka,' 'tinka,' 'tinka,' are often uttered whilst the bird is sitting on the ground or on a post or sod wall. One correspondent states he has never been able to make out whether both cock and hen birds make the 'drumming,' but he fancies it is only the cock bird. I am not aware that any naturalist has stated that the hen bird 'drums' as well as the male, but I think I can settle this point in the affirmative, for one day I visited a very small strip of bog, and almost immediately rose the cock bird, which commenced to 'drum' above and around

me in a short time. I flushed the hen off her nest of three eggs, and as she left it she dropped the fourth egg, which broke in its fall, and the bird, continuing its flight, struck itself against some posts and rails, and fell stunned to the ground, but soon recovered and flew away. I marked it, and afterwards went and put it up. All this time the male was 'drumming' overhead, and no other snipes were in the neighbourhood. The female now joined in the 'drumming,' and the two were 'drumming' for some time, and then they both alighted on the tops of posts, and allowed me to walk quite near them, nodding their heads at me all the while. In this instance, at any rate, I think there can be no doubt whatever that both male and female were 'drumming,' as I walked the small strip of bog out over and over again without flushing another snipe."

All three of our British snipe are great and persistent travellers. The common snipe, for instance, is known from Greenland to the Gambia, and passes in its migrations to the Atlantic Islands, the Upper Nile, and as far eastward as India. Its breeding-places are in the northern and central parts of Europe and Asia. In Europe it has been found nesting so far south as North Italy. The double snipe nests no further south in Europe than Holland and Poland, so far as is at present known. Its range is a very wide one, and it travels through Africa as far south as Natal and the Transvaal, where, as well as in Damaraland (German South-West Africa), it has been identified. I have met with this bird in British Bechuanaland, and I believe it has been shot not infrequently in the Orange River Colony and the Cape Colony. In its eastern peregrinations it wanders to the Tian Shian Mountains, Turkestan, and the Yenesei River in the north. The jack-snipe breeds in the northern parts of Europe and Siberia, and ranges in its winter migration to North Africa, India, and as far east as Japan.

It has been confidently supposed by some Englishmen who have shot snipe in South Africa that the birds bagged belonged to our well-known British species, the common snipe (*Gallinago cælestis*). This is a mistake. The common snipe has never yet been identified in that country, or, indeed, in Africa south of the equator. The mistake, however, is a pardonable one. The common South African snipe (*Gallinago nigripennis*) bears a great resemblance to our English bird, yet it is to be readily distinguished by an examination of the tail feathers. The British snipe has only fourteen of these feathers, while the South African species—a bird found widely in the continent of Africa—possesses sixteen. The African snipe is also richer in colouring and of somewhat larger size. Cape snipe give excellent sport, and very good bags are made with them. From thirty to thirty-five couple is by no means an uncommon record to a single gun in half a day's shooting. These birds, of course, shift a good deal with the seasons and are found most plentifully during the time of rains. One of the painted snipes (*Rhynchæa Capensis*), a very beautiful bird, is also found in South Africa, but not in such large numbers as the common African or black-quilled species. African snipe are, in my experience, by no means such difficult shooting as are their English cousins, the common snipe and jack-snipe. The flight of the South African bird is, compared with that of our English snipe, slow and laboured, and the average gunner will find them much more easily bagged. The Cape snipe, by the way, weighs occasionally as much as eight or nine ounces, which is about the weight of our double or solitary snipe.

Of all these birds none, in my opinion—although I know that the double snipe has a great and deserved reputation—can excel in flavour our common snipe,

which, well and delicately cooked, is not to be surpassed by any table bird in the world. The pity of it is that there is so little of it! I once heard a *viveur* say, "Ah, if only the snipe were as big as a partridge!" Well, if that were the case, the bird would be in such immense demand that it would become, I fancy, in no long time an extinct creature.

Although snipe in England are not as plentiful as they were a hundred years ago, before drainage had made such immense strides over the country, some excellent bags are still made here and there. In November, 1899, only a month or so before his death, the late Duke of Westminster killed to his own gun, on the Alford withy-bed of his Eaton estate, 65 snipe, the total bag for the day being 118 birds. Within the last score of years 53 couple of snipe have been shot on the Blenheim estate in a single day by Lord Walsingham, the Duke of Roxburgh, and the Hon. E. Marjoribanks. And on the same estate 48½ couple have been shot by two guns during a day's sport. This was in the heart of Oxfordshire, by no means a marshy or snipe-favoured county.

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